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# THE ★ VIDEO CAMPAIGN

## Network Coverage of the 1988 Primaries

S. Robert Lichter
Daniel Amundson
Richard Noyes

AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH
CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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# 1
# Setting the Scene

*Nobody knows what the hell's goin' on.*
--Curtis Wilkie, *Boston Globe*

It was a roller coaster election, packed with thrills and spills, drama and trauma, stunning surprises, and reckless surmises. Who could have predicted such odd couples as Gary Hart and Donna Rice, Joe Biden and Neil Kinnock, or Ed Koch and Al Gore? Who could have known that George Bush and Bob Dole would both get mean, but Bush would pick the right fight (against Dan Rather) and Dole the wrong one (against Bush after New Hampshire)? Who would have guessed that Dick Gephardt would fight the establishment or that Jesse Jackson would join it? Certainly not the media.

It is not surprising that *Boston Globe* reporter Wilkie couldn't get a handle on the elections early in 1988. His colleagues had the same trouble. In February, *Newsweek* media critic Jonathan Alter complained, "The press is held captive in Campaignland--the worst possible vantage point from which to make sense of anything. The extension cords that connect political coverage to the rest of the country have become hopelessly tangled."[1]

During the next few months campaign journalists would deal with the rapid rise and fall of Gephardt and Pat Robertson, Bush's near disaster in Iowa and spectacular recovery in New Hampshire, Dole's near miss in New Hampshire and subsequent tailspin, the Jesse Jackson phenomenon, the New York showdown, and, not to be overlooked, the emergence of Michael Dukakis as the tortoise who outlasted all the Democratic hares.

Making sense of all this on daily deadline is not easy, especially while continually being assailed for bias, inaccuracy, and arrogance. At one time or another, just about everybody took a shot at the press. Gephardt's backers called them yuppie elitists for bashing their man's trade proposals. Hart ripped them for stressing his hijinks instead of his high-mindedness. Dole lashed out at liberal ideologues who would not give Republicans a fair shake. Bush squared off against Rather while Robertson blasted Tom Brokaw. Jackson's supporters claimed he was treated like a horse of a different color, while his opponents muttered (not for attribution) about his free ride. Even noncandidate Mario Cuomo complained that his noncandidacy was not taken seriously enough. No wonder Alter's *Newsweek* piece was headlined, "The media is as confused as the election itself."

Yet the campaign somehow got covered, as it does every four years, with nightly reports on the three television networks that embody "the media" for their millions of viewers. There the peculiarities, idiosyncrasies, and unique events of campaign '88 were sorted into the soothingly predictable categories of election coverage--the horse race, the issues, the candidate profiles, the campaign strategies and tactics, the inside dope from informed sources, and the gaffes and one-liners that together form the spectrum of election news.

Just as journalists rely on the methods of their craft to bring some order into the flux and frenzy of presidential campaigns, so scholars in recent years have begun to apply the methods of social science to understanding the patterns of campaign journalism. Led by the pathbreaking studies of Richard Hofstetter in 1972, Thomas Patterson in 1976, and Michael Robinson in 1980, they have honed and sharpened the tool of content analysis to dissect the who, what, when, and where of campaign coverage.[2] (As in journalism itself, the how and why remain the toughest assignments.)

Content analysis is a technique that allows researchers to classify the news objectively and systematically according to explicit rules and clear criteria. The goal is to produce valid measures of news content, and the hallmark of success lies in reliability. Other investigators who apply the same procedures to the same material should obtain the same results, although their interpretations of those results may differ.

For example, the amount of coverage a candidate receives can be measured in various ways--by the amount of time he appears physically onscreen, by the number of times he is mentioned or quoted, by the number of stories that focus on him, and so forth. Whichever method is chosen, the result can be expressed in absolute terms or relative to other candidates. And the question of whether a given amount of coverage is fair or appropriate requires judgments or interpretations that go beyond the data. But once a certain standard of measurement is chosen and rules for applying it are codified, different researchers should come up with about the same numerical findings, regardless of their own ideological or partisan predilections.

Good and bad press are harder to measure objectively than the sheer amount of coverage, but the task is by no means impossible. First you decide which topics are relevant (for example, discussions of the candidate's competence, integrity, consistency, and the like). Then you determine the tone of each statement dealing with one of these topics. The result may be coded as positive ("Reagan is a great communicator"), negative ("Reagan often gets his facts wrong"), mixed ("Reagan is a master at using anecdotes, but he often gets his facts wrong"), or neutral ("Reagan's use of anecdotes has stirred debate").

Some judgments are more difficult than these, and coders must be guided by clear rules. In making each decision, coders should be applying rules, not expressing their own opinions. If the rules are sufficiently clear, two coders working independently should come to the same conclusions, regardless of their own opinions about the subject matter.

Content analysis is not a panacea. The quality of a study depends on the way the coding categories are constructed, the clarity and appropriateness of the rules that guide coders in applying them, and the skill of the coders in doing so. Nonetheless, the difference between content analysis and casual monitoring is akin to the difference between scientific polling and man-on-the-street interviews.

Guided by the lessons of previous research, as well as the logistical requirements of rapid-response media monitoring, we applied the best procedures developed during earlier election studies, along with some refinements of our own. Our aim was to publish the results rapidly enough that journalists and news watchers alike could evaluate the coverage as it developed rather than after the fact.[3]

We viewed all election stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news shows beginning on February 8, 1987, a full year before the Iowa caucuses. This volume presents the results from that date through the end of the primary season on June 7, 1988. (The study will continue through the general election in November.) To be selected for analysis, a story either had to be devoted in large measure to the election or had to focus on one or more of the candidates, with reference to their campaigns. For example, a story about George Bush's activities as vice president was not included if it made no mention of his quest for the presidency.

There was no lack of material. During the sixteen months covered, the networks broadcast 1,338 election stories with a combined airtime of 40 hours and 17 minutes. That total broke down to 418 stories lasting 14 hours and 5 minutes on CBS, 464 stories lasting 13 hours and 48 minutes on NBC, and 456 stories lasting 12 hours and 24 minutes on ABC. Of course, these averages mask the ebb and flow of election news that followed the rhythms of the campaign. During 1987, before the start of the primary season, the three networks together broadcast an average of just over one story a night. Even then, periods of intense activity alternated with long lulls in the coverage. For example, the Donna Rice scandal generated twenty stories on Gary Hart in four days in May, and Biden's borrowed oratory was the subject of fourteen stories in September.

When the bell rang for the contenders to square off in Iowa, the coverage really began to heat up. The networks averaged six and one-half stories a night from January 1, 1988, through the Iowa caucuses. But even that was just the warm-up for New Hampshire, when the coverage doubled to nearly fourteen stories a night. It dropped to eight stories nightly during the Super Tuesday campaign, six stories a night from Super Tuesday through the New York primary, and fewer than four stories each night thereafter.

Each story was taped during its broadcast and later reviewed by coders who analyzed it according to dozens of criteria ranging from length and placement in the broadcast to the use of sources, treatment of the candidates, and viewpoints expressed on various issues. The coder entered each judgment onto a code sheet that listed the options in numerical form. The resulting data were then entered into a computer, where they could be aggregated and analyzed most efficiently. To standardize coding decisions, each coding category was defined in a written codebook. Each coder learned to apply the coding system in training sessions of 100-200 hours.

The building blocks of the study were not the news stories themselves but rather every statement of fact or opinion that appeared on each story about the candidates or the campaign. By using individual statements as the unit of analysis, the coders avoided having to make global judgments about entire stories. Instead they classified discrete bits of information from individual sources within each story. They identified not only the issues that were raised and the viewpoints expressed, but also the individual or group that was the source of each statement. (We also analyzed visual aspects of the coverage, but time constraints preclude presentation of the results in this volume.) To test the reliability of the content analysis system, two fully trained coders independently reviewed 150 stories. We retained only the variables on which their coding decisions were in agreement at least 80 percent of the time. On most variables the level of agreement was even higher.

The following chapters present the results of this analysis. Chapter 2 examines the issues, themes, and topics of coverage that together form the context within which the election takes place. In chapters 3 and 4 attention shifts from the electoral context to the candidates themselves. Chapter 3 considers evaluations of each candidate's viability. Did the media's assessments of the horse race affect the outcome of the race? We consider separately judgments about each campaign's organizational and financial base, the movement of public opinion, each candidate's electoral showing, and the expectations race--efforts to evaluate past performances and to predict future performance. Chapter 4 takes on the heated debate over bias in campaign coverage. Specifically, it examines assessments of each candidate's desirability, including discussions of character, past job performance, abilities as a campaigner, and stands on policy issues.

Finally, chapter 5 asks what it all means and whether it matters in the end. Did the networks get the story right? Did they intrude unduly into the electoral process? Did the coverage help some candidates and hurt others? In short, after all the sound and fury, did the media make a difference for better or for worse? To find out, let us tune in the latest episode of that quadrennial drama we know as elections in the media age.

## Notes

1. *Newsweek*, February 1, 1988, p. 24.
2. C. Richard Hofstetter, *Bias in the News* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976); Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election* (New York: Praeger, 1980); Michael J. Robinson and Margaret A. Sheehan, *Over the Wire and on TV* (New York: Russell Sage, 1983).
3. Results appear each month in *Media Monitor*, a newsletter published by the Center for Media and Public Affairs.

# 2

# Getting the Story

*Don't blame us, blame the candidates. If you don't cover the race, what do you cover?*

--Hal Bruno, ABC

For most Americans today, presidential campaigns take place on television. Any education about the issues they raise must take place there as well. For the networks, the challenge in covering such a far-flung event as the presidential campaign is enormous. The election provides a story so vast that simply reporting its daily developments requires something of a minor technological miracle. The networks, recognizing their role as educators as well as reporters, promise to do their utmost to inform the voters about the issues before each election cycle begins. But making the thousands of necessary judgments about which stories to run, which issues to focus on, and which candidates to investigate is a thankless task bound to provoke controversy.

In looking at the broad contours of television news election coverage, we examined each story in several ways. We looked first to see what, in general terms, the story was about. After deciding what the main topics of the story were, we checked to see which issues were raised and who mentioned them. We also noted any viewpoints expressed about some of the more controversial issues and themes of the campaign, such as aid to the contras, questions of media responsibility, and debates over a tax increase. These areas of inquiry provided a wealth of information about the shape of election coverage--the topics, the issues, and the themes of campaign '88.

## Equal Time

The networks gave heavy coverage to the races in both parties. The Democratic contest was the focus of 635 stories, and the Republican race 459. The difference reflects Bush's early knockout of his rivals on Super Tuesday, six weeks before the New York primary effectively ended the Democratic struggle. There was almost no difference in the amount of coverage received by the Democrats and the Republicans until Super Tuesday. During the thirteen months from February 8, 1987, through March 8, 1988, 374 stories focused on the Republican candidates or the race for the Republican nomination, while 373 stories covered the race for the Democratic nomination. The three networks each divided their time about equally between the two parties.

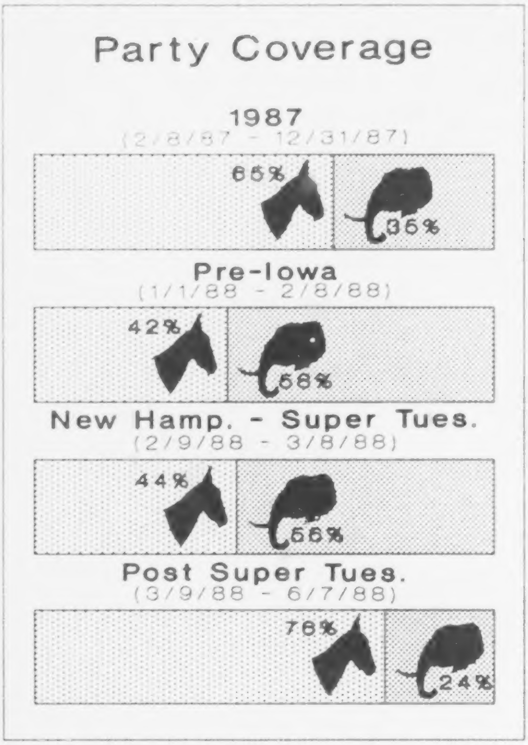


*Figure 2-1.*

Yet even this partial picture of equal coverage masks some sharp variations at key points during the campaign. In 1987 the Democratic race received nearly twice as many stories as the Republican. After the first of the year, as the race heated up, this situation nearly reversed itself. In the five weeks before the Iowa caucuses, Republican coverage increased and Democratic coverage decreased (see figure 2-1).

The reason for this shift is apparent. In 1987 the Democrats, led by front-runner Gary Hart and his various foibles, provided the best stories and the most news. Hart was the focus of about 100 stories in 1987, more than half of the entire Democratic coverage for that year. His reported relationship with Donna Rice, his subsequent withdrawal from the race, and his surprise reentry in December made Hart a central figure in Democratic coverage. In early 1988, though, after the turmoil in the Democratic race had subsided, it was the Republicans--especially George Bush and Robert Dole--who made news with their repeated attacks on each other. They grabbed the media spotlight, eclipsing the Democrats during the Iowa campaign.

As the scene shifted to Super Tuesday, the Republicans continued to receive more coverage. Again, the reason seems tied to events. Pat Robertson's surprise second-place showing in Iowa placed additional scrutiny on the former religious broadcaster, which boosted the amount of Republican coverage. After the first sweep of profiles on this new political phenomenon, Robertson himself continued to attract attention with his various eyebrow-raising statements from the campaign trail. No single candidate, not even Jesse Jackson, commanded as much attention as Robertson between Iowa and Super Tuesday.

After Super Tuesday, because the Republican race was virtually over, coverage again focused heavily on the Democratic race. Between Super Tuesday and the Wisconsin primary, the networks broadcast twice as much coverage of Democrats as of Republicans. By the New York campaign, coverage of the Republican race had virtually disappeared. After New York, even though George Bush attracted media attention, the Republican race remained mostly off camera. Most of Bush's coverage consisted of previews of the general election, while coverage of the Democratic nomination race continued at high levels.

The bottom line was roughly equal amounts of coverage for the two campaigns--as long as two campaigns still existed. When the Republican race evaporated, its coverage dissipated as well.

## The Early Bird Gets the Camera

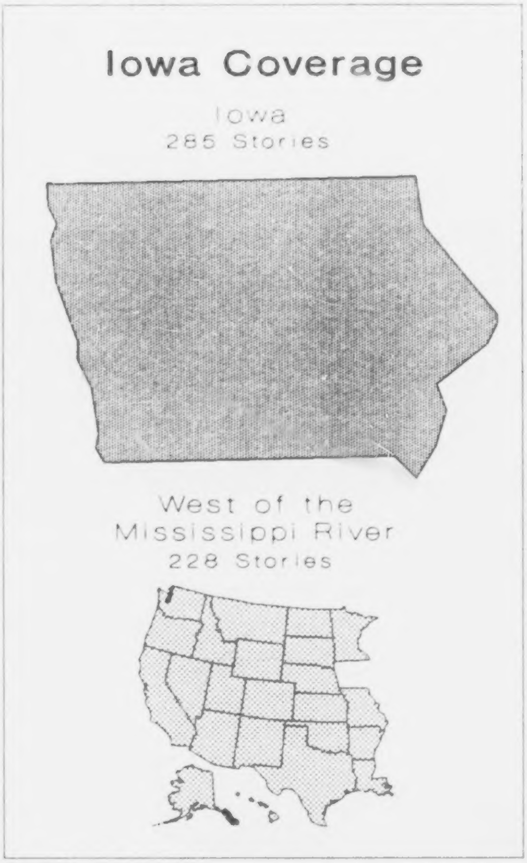


*Figure 2-2.*

Every four years the networks flock to Des Moines and Nashua like swallows returning to Capistrano. Once again in 1988, Iowa and New Hampshire received a disproportionate share of the coverage. Those two states, which are home to only 3 percent of the population, accounted for 34 percent of the election coverage. Iowa alone received more coverage than all Super Tuesday states combined. In fact, there were more references to Iowa than to all other states west of the Mississippi River combined (see figure 2-2). If only extensive discussions of the state contests are counted, there were more analyses of Iowa and New Hampshire than of *all* other states combined.

Throughout the primary season, we coded 1,262 discussions of the primaries and caucuses, which together chose 5,779 delegates to the two national conventions. This means that on average a convention delegate merited the attention of just over one-fifth of a news story. An Iowa delegate, however, was worth an average of three news stories, while a New Hampshire delegate drew five stories, or twenty-five times the norm. The states that chose the greatest numbers of delegates--New York, California, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Illinois--drew slightly below the average of one-fifth of a story per delegate (see table 2-1). Half of all state contests merited five mentions or fewer on the evening news, in stark contrast to Iowa's 285 mentions and New Hampshire's 210.

**Coverage of Major Contests**

| State | Mentions | | Delegates | Ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Iowa | 285 | | 89 | 3:1 |
| New Hampshire | 210 | | 41 | 5:1 |
| New York | 91 | | 391 | 1:4 |
| Illinois | 66 | | 265 | 1:4 |
| Michigan | 63 | | 215 | 1:3 |
| Wisconsin | 51 | | 128 | 1:3 |
| Pennsylvania | 45 | | 274 | 1:6 |
| California | 41 | | 389 | 1:9 |
| Super Tuesday | 122 | 228 | 2056 | 1:9 |
| South | 106 | | | |

*Table 2-1.*

The perceived importance of Iowa quickly began to dwindle in retrospect. After Super Tuesday, analysts noted with some irony that Robert Dole and Richard Gephardt had been virtually knocked out of the race within a month of their Iowa victories. When NBC's Tom Pettit returned to Iowa in mid-May to report on a dispute about which candidate actually received the most votes in the February caucuses, the *Des Moines Register*'s James Gannon laughed, "It's all irrelevant now. Gephardt's irrelevant. Iowa is irrelevant. What difference does it make?"

Why all this attention if Iowa is irrelevant? Part of the answer lies in the routinization of election coverage. Journalists trek to Iowa because that is *the* place to begin. Before 1976, little coverage was given to the Iowa caucuses. Jimmy Carter's surprise victory that year prompted election journalists to consider the idea that Iowa, not New Hampshire, was the place in which candidates developed their initial momentum. The amount of coverage given to Iowa grew steadily in subsequent elections. During the primary season of 1984, political scientist William C. Adams found that more attention was still being paid to New Hampshire, which accounted for 19 percent of the total election coverage. But Iowa was a clear second with 13 percent.[1] In 1988 Iowa eclipsed New Hampshire for the first time, drawing 19 percent of the coverage to New Hampshire's 15 percent.

These days, the next campaign begins before the previous victor is inaugurated. As a result, handicapping and predictions start well before the election year. In the twelve months before the Iowa caucuses, 187 network news stories, or about one out of three election stories, included some discussion of public opinion polls. The Iowa caucuses gain attention as the first test of the strength of those polling results. During the 1987 preseason, Iowa and New Hampshire together accounted for 77 percent of all contest coverage. Including this period raises Iowa's share to 23 percent of contest coverage and New Hampshire's to 17 percent.

## In the Center Ring

The best-documented aspect of election coverage is the media's fondness for the horse race over policy issues. Thomas Patterson found in 1976 that three-fifths of network coverage was oriented to the horse race.[2] In 1980 Michael Robinson branded the networks "horse racists" for their excessive treatment of the contest aspects of the campaign.[3] During the 1984 general election, however, Robinson noted a decline in horse-race coverage, since there wasn't much of a race to cover.[4]

What was the story in 1988? In our examination of network coverage, we compared the number of stories containing some substantive discussion of the horse race with those focusing on policy or campaign issues. Our least surprising finding was that the horse race once again finished several lengths ahead of the field. Some 537 stories dealt with the horse race, or 40 percent of all election stories that were broadcast.

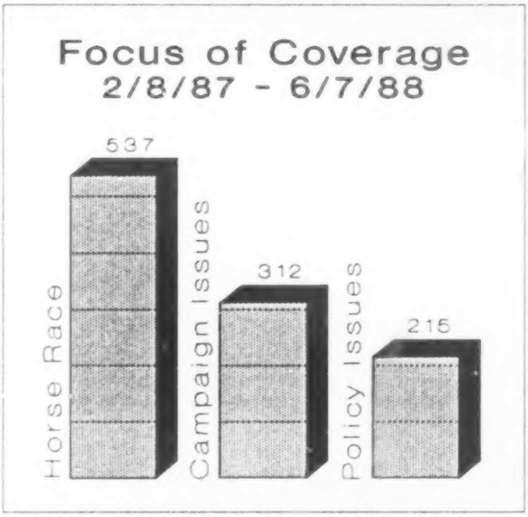


*Figure 2-3.*

Election news in 1987 and 1988 brought far less discussion of policy issues. Only about one story in six contained any substantive issue discussion. Policy issues were outpaced by the greater number of mentions given to both the horse race and campaign issues (see figure 2-3). Only after the New York primary, when the nominating races were virtually locked up, did policy issues receive more coverage than the horse race. Thus, the bulk of the network news election stories ignored any substantive discussion of the issues. Even during 1987, when there were virtually no campaign developments to report, only one story in eight contained any substantive issue discussion (see figure 2-4).

Much more attention was devoted in the preseason to so-called campaign issues. These issues revolved around campaign trail news such as Gary Hart's dalliances, Joe Biden's plagiarism, Pat Robertson's various controversial assertions, and Bob Dole's financial irregularities. More than a quarter of all election stories dealt with such campaign issues. Many of them focused on questions of character. Of 153 stories that dealt with a candidate's character, half were about Gary Hart. His nearest rivals for the character spotlight were George Bush and Pat Robertson. Bush accounted for only eighteen such stories and Robertson for fourteen.

But the media do not treat all campaign issues alike. The episode that revealed Gary Hart "up close and personal" followed his public dare to the media, while exposure of Joe Biden's

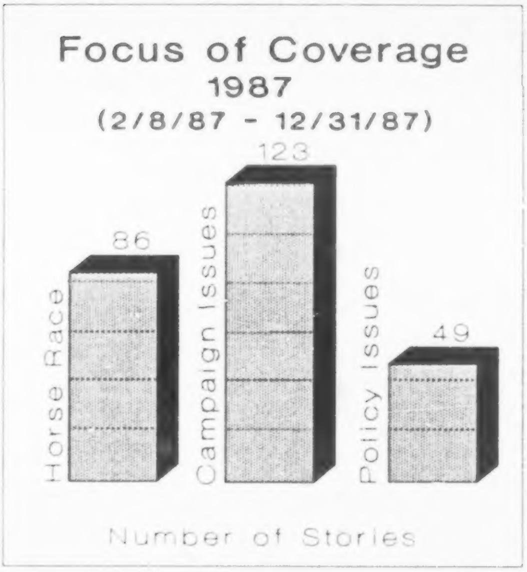


*Figure 2-4.*

plagiarism began with a helpful push from a rival campaign. The nature of the transgression and the reaction of the candidate are important factors in determining the eventual magnitude of these campaign issues. Philandering, never a positive character point, brings in sexual overtones that can reduce a candidate to an object of ridicule and derision. Badly handled by the Hart campaign, this became one of the biggest news stories of 1987. Plagiarism so strongly resembles lying that it cannot be ignored either. Given Biden's dark-horse status at the time his big story broke, surrender was the better part of valor. By contrast, the Dukakis campaign escaped its connection to Biden's downfall with the resignation of only two staff members.

Campaign issues that do not involve character are treated somewhat differently. Many of Robertson's disputed statements, for example, reflected his ideology and policy proposals and as such were treated more carefully by reporters. His verbal gaffes did not reflect moral or ethical failings, only political ineptitude. Robertson was also able to explain his statements while presenting a united front to quell further speculation. His damage control efforts were only partly successful, but he managed to stay in the race long enough to let the voters render a verdict.

Another major campaign issue was the high amount of negative advertising, especially early in the campaign. But the flak it drew was not aimed at any particular candidate. As a campaign issue, negative advertising reflected more on the general state of politics than on the individuals running for office. Stories about character issues, in contrast, reflected strongly on those candidates who received such personalized attention.

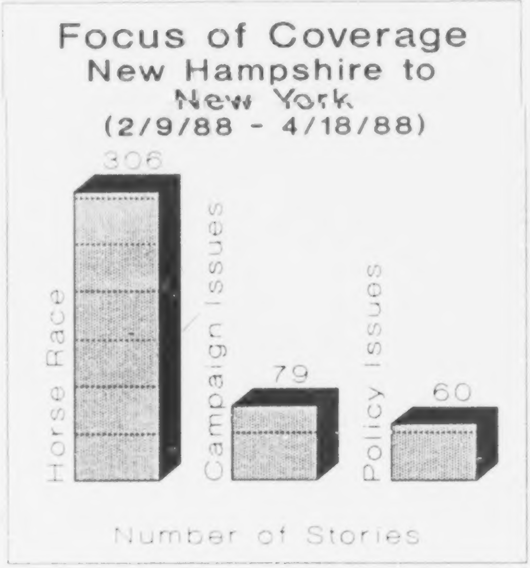


*Figure 2-5.*

Many journalists themselves took issue with the media's emphasis on character, and the television news coverage reflected their ambivalence. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the sixty-seven sources with a clear opinion argued that the media overplayed this issue. But most of the debate about the media as "character cop" took place in 1987. In fact, we recorded no viewpoints on this theme after the Iowa caucuses. Despite dire predictions of a camera in every bedroom, the issue evaporated quickly after the primary season got under way.

The character debate underscores the lack of issue discussion early in the campaign. In 1987, when the campaign was relatively unstructured, policy issues received only about a quarter as much attention as campaign trail stories. Without the horse race to dominate coverage, it was campaign trail intrigue, not policy issues, that dominated the early debate. After the primary season officially began, policy issues were overshadowed by the horse race rather than campaign issues.

About 40 percent of all election stories dealt in large part with the contest aspects of the election, compared with 16 percent on policy issues. The figures are even more dramatic for coverage during the height of primary season (see figure 2-5). Between February 9 (the day after the Iowa caucuses) and April 18 (the last day of the New York primary campaign), 59 percent of all stories gave extensive discussion to the horse race. This preoccupation with the horse race was largely responsible for the dearth of issue coverage. The only time when policy issues received any sustained attention was in the last weeks of the primary season. Even then they were dealt with only about as often as the horse race, which had become a mere formality.

## Talking Points

Despite the paucity of extended issue discussion in campaign news, many issues received passing mention, while others just passed away. We examined each story for its issue content, and noted each mention of a policy issue. Domestic policy issues--such as the economy, unemployment, taxes, and trade--were discussed most often. The major exception was the Iran-contra affair, which was the single most cited issue in the campaign. Surprisingly, Democrats tended to keep hands off this highly volatile issue, providing only about 5 percent of the 301 references to it. It was Republicans who paid heavy attention to Iran-contra, providing 40 percent of the references. (The balance was accounted for by reporters and sources whose political affiliations were not identified.)

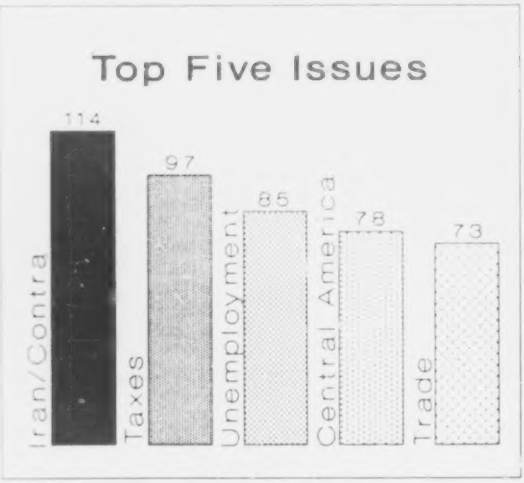


*Figure 2-6.*

In general, Republican emphasis on the Iran-contra affair reflected the intraparty battle for the nomination. But it also reflected the tendency of Repub-

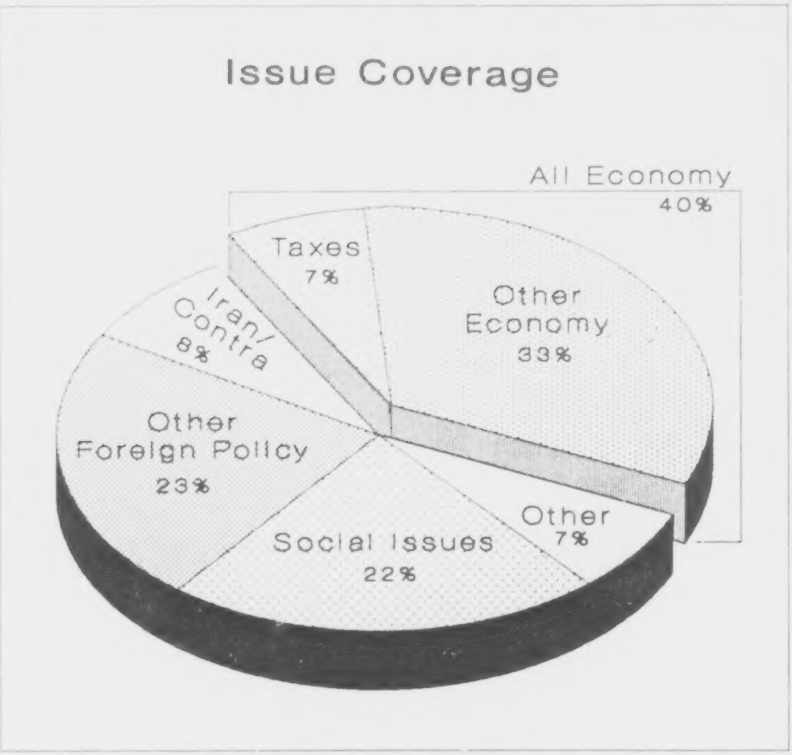


*Figure 2-7.*

licans to stress foreign policy issues. Until Super Tuesday, when coverage of the Republicans began to trail off, Republicans mentioned foreign policy issues four times as often as Democrats. Republican candidates devoted just under half their issue discussion (45 percent) to foreign policy questions; Democrats devoted less than a quarter of their issue discussion to foreign affairs. The only time foreign affairs dominated the Democratic debate was during the New York campaign, when Middle East policy and relations with Israel became the main issue.

Apart from the Iran-contra affair, the major issues of the campaign revolved around the economy. Taxes were the second most discussed issue in the campaign, followed by unemployment (see figure 2-6). When related issues such as trade and the budget deficit are added, the economy accounted for a full 40 percent of all issue discussion. Foreign policy formed 31 percent of the issue discussion, social issues made up 21 percent, and all other issues accounted for the remaining 7 percent (see figure 2-7).

The parties' discussions of the economy provided a mirror image of the foreign policy debate. The economy was the subject of nearly half of all Democratic issue discussion (47 percent), while contributing substantially less to Republican issue discussion (27 percent). This seems odd in an election year when pundits declared the robust economy to be one of the Republican party's greatest assets. In fact, we found that inflation--whose reduction had been billed by the administration as one of their greatest feats--was cited less often than any other issue. Democrats discussed economic problems far more often than Republicans mentioned their economic accomplishments (see figure 2-8).

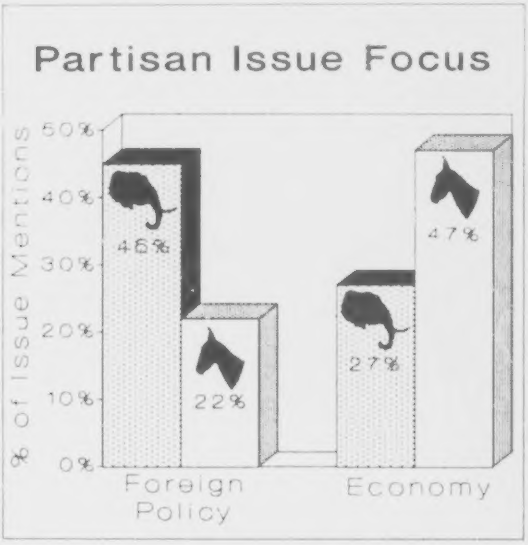


*Figure 2-8.*

In 1987, when the campaign revolved mostly around insider politics, the Iran-contra affair received the most mentions, followed by taxes and arms control. Before the Iowa caucuses, Iran-contra and farm issues were the main topics of debate. After Bush's loss in Iowa, discussion of the Iran-contra affair evaporated, and taxes and energy policy became the most discussed issues during the New Hampshire primary. Discussions about energy policy focused on the Granite State's longstanding dispute over the Seabrook nuclear plant. Farm policy, the biggest domestic issue before the Iowa caucuses, disappeared as soon as that contest was concluded (see table 2-2).

Perhaps no campaign was so dominated by a single issue as the New York primary. Middle East policy, particularly the question of U.S. policy toward Israel, stood out from all other issues. Civil rights, particularly the strained state of race relations in New York City, was a distant second. Although Middle East policy disappeared as a campaign issue after New York, debates over civil rights continued during the remaining primaries. The biggest issues of those final weeks were the drug problem and Central American policy, particularly the crisis in Panama. When the primaries ended in June, the issues that had so dominated the early campaign--Iran-contra, farm policy, and arms control--had virtually disappeared.

The Janus face of election news is the issues that are not mentioned. From February 1987, through the New York primary in April 1988, for example, events in the Persian Gulf and the public health crisis of AIDS were covered extensively as general news. An average of at least one story per night dealt with the Persian Gulf crisis during that time period. Similarly, over 300 network news stories dealt with the AIDS epidemic during that time period.

In election reporting, however, discussions of AIDS and the Persian Gulf were extremely rare. Only one out of every 200 election stories mentioned these issues. That they were heavily discussed outside the election context points to reasons other than the networks' own judgment for their absence. It was the candidates, not the media, who were reluctant to discuss those issues on the campaign trail.

## Taking Sides

Two types of issues usually emerge during election campaigns: (1) polarized issues, on which visible and basic differences of opinion exist between two sides and (2) the diffuse issues that political scientists call valence issues, on which no stark difference of opinion exists. An example of the latter is the drug problem. It is very difficult to find a candidate who will argue that illegal drugs are beneficial. Nor were some politicians' calls for legalization echoed on the campaign trail. Differences of

### Top Issues Over Time

| Period | Issue | Percent | Total Mentions |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1987 | Iran/contra | 9.5% | 31 |
| | Taxes | 7.0% | 23 |
| | Arms Control | 6.4% | 21 |
| | Education | 5.2% | 17 |
| | Budget Deficit | 4.6% | 15 |
| Iowa | Iran/contra | 16.7% | 46 |
| | Farm Issues | 7.2% | 20 |
| | Taxes | 6.9% | 19 |
| | Trade | 5.1% | 14 |
| | Budget Deficit | 5.1% | 14 |
| New Hamp. | Taxes | 14.7% | 19 |
| | Energy Policy | 8.5% | 11 |
| | Soviet Relations | 7.8% | 10 |
| | Trade | 7.0% | 9 |
| | Arms Control | 5.4% | 7 |
| Super Tuesday | Taxes | 9.2% | 17 |
| | Trade | 9.2% | 17 |
| | Unemployment | 5.5% | 10 |
| | Defense Spending | 4.9% | 9 |
| | Budget Deficit | 4.3% | 8 |
| Midwest | Unemployment | 15.0% | 23 |
| | Trade | 7.8% | 12 |
| | Drugs | 7.2% | 11 |
| | Iran/contra | 7.2% | 11 |
| | Central America Policy | 6.5% | 10 |

*Table 2-2.*

### Top Issues Over Time
(Continued)

| Period | Issue | Percent | Total Mentions |
|---|---|---|---|
| New York | Middle East Policy | 20.0% | 18 |
| | Civil Rights | 11.0% | 10 |
| | Drugs | 8.0% | 7 |
| | Defense Spending | 8.0% | 7 |
| | Unemployment | 6.8% | 6 |
| Post-New York | Drugs | 10.8% | 33 |
| | Central America | 8.6% | 26 |
| | Unemployment | 7.6% | 23 |
| | Civil Rights | 5.6% | 17 |
| | Iran/contra | 3.9% | 12 |

*Table 2-2.*

opinion on such issues tend to be matters of degree and nuance, with every candidate trying to stake out the strongest claim to a universally popular position (such as, getting tough on drugs).

Four policy issues both polarized and provoked extensive debate in the 1988 campaign coverage--the Reagan administration's record, arms control, aid to the contras, and tax policy.

**The Reagan Administration**. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of all ninety-six sources with a clear opinion criticized the Reagan administration. Most of those assessments took place before the Iowa caucuses. Republicans, George Bush in particular, made all the positive assessments. Endorsements of the administration were nonexistent among Democratic candidates, who made two-thirds of the criticisms aired. Although the height of the primary season saw a virtual 50-50 split in assessments of the administration, this failed to offset the more critical picture that emerged earlier.

Televised assessments of the Reagan administration increased after the New York campaign, foreshadowing the fall campaign.

Four out of five sources provided negative assessments of the administration's record as the primary season wound down. Dukakis began to position himself for the general election, asserting on CBS April 25, "The foreign policy record of this administration leaves much to be desired, and I see it as a major issue for Democrats in Central America, the Middle East, at the negotiating table, and a lot of other places." Fellow Democrat Jesse Jackson, on NBC April 26, demanded to know, "Seven years after Reagan and Bush, are steel workers better off?" The coverage was particularly one-sided during this period partly because Bush had begun to distance himself from the administration and was providing mild criticism rather than praise.

**Arms Control**. The INF treaty was a big issue in late 1987 and early 1988. By nearly a four-to-one margin (78 to 22 percent), most sources who voiced an opinion supported the treaty. George Bush was the treaty's chief proponent on the campaign trail. During a debate with his five GOP rivals, Bush gave it his wholehearted endorsement: "The good thing about this treaty is that it is a major breakthrough in verification. People say you'll never get this kind of verification, and now we have it, and so I think the president is absolutely correct." Opposition to the treaty came mostly from Bush's Republican opponents. Jack Kemp cautioned, "We should not rush into signing an agreement with the Soviet Union until we force them to comply with previous agreements." Alexander Haig was even more negative: "It's too late to scuttle what has already happened, but it seems to me we need some commitment on conventional forces." Debate about the strategic defense initiative (SDI, or Star Wars) was much more limited. Only a handful of sources, all Democrats, expressed clear opinions about Star Wars, and all were opposed to the missile defense system.

**Aid to the Contras**. Much of the debate about aid to the contras took place as the House and Senate prepared to vote on a contra aid package during the Iowa campaign. The debate on the airwaves was as one-sided as the INF treaty debate. This time the contra aid opponents held a 78 to 22 percent lead over proponents. Democratic sources lined up solidly against contra aid, while Republicans all favored assistance. Democratic candidates Michael Dukakis and Richard Gephardt both attacked contra aid in a CBS story aired February 3, 1988, Dukakis with uncharacteristic passion: "End this fiasco, stop the killing and stop the conflict, and begin the process of peace, human rights, economic opportunity in Central America." Gephardt was equally direct: "The contra war is wrong. It is clear that it cannot be won, and the administration's only answer is more of the same."

Not only were Republican supporters of contra aid outnumbered more than three to one, but their voices were more muted than the clarion tones adopted by the Democrats. George Bush provided his support in characteristically diffuse terms: "My policy: keep the pressure on. Keep supporting those who want freedom." Republicans proved unable or unwilling to seize the media offensive on the contra aid debate.

**Taxes**. Campaign '88 featured a great many mentions of taxes, but few contenders were willing to take a stand. Of the thirty-four clear opinions expressed, 60 percent were opposed to a tax hike or in favor of a cut. The remainder were for a tax hike. Bruce Babbitt was one of the most outspoken, criticizing Reagan policies on an ABC report of January 17, "You know, since 1984 there's been kind of a sense that maybe the president had discovered some kind of exception to the laws of economics." In a campaign debate he stood up to show that he was taking a stand on taxes. But his rivals refused to join him, and his campaign soon fell flat on its face.

The Republicans were not without their tax warriors. As one Kemp commercial declared, "You can count on Jack Kemp to say no to higher taxes." Shortly thereafter, George Bush took Bob Dole to task on taxes with an ad declaring, "Bob Dole straddled. He just can't say no to higher taxes." Whether or not Bush was tough enough on foreign drug dealers, he was determined to get tough on taxes.

## Media Coverage

Another frequent topic of election news stories was the media's own role in the election. One out of every twenty election stories dealt extensively with the media's campaign role. Most of the stories ran in 1987, beginning with the debate over the *Miami Herald's* role in knocking Gary Hart out of the race. For example, NBC's John Hart examined the role of the press in a report on May 7, 1987, just days after the Donna Rice scandal broke. A.M. Rosenthal of the *New York Times* told him that the *Miami Herald* reporters "had some information and a lot of innuendo, so I think as a story it was poorly written and poorly handled. . . .I don't think a story of that importance should be handled that rapidly." The *Herald's* Heath Meriwether defended his paper's actions, pointing out that one should "look at the essential facts of what we've reported. We reported that Senator Hart spent much of the weekend with a 29-year-old model while his wife was in Colorado."

Such a public examination of journalistic tactics meant that accusations of media irresponsibility would receive considerable attention. During 1987 most of the forty-nine sources who raised the issue agreed that the media had behaved badly. Only 29 percent of those sources with a clear opinion argued that the media were acting responsibly; 71 percent argued the opposite.

The preponderance of criticism partly reflected the unease many journalists felt at being thrust into the role of "character up." *New York Times'* columnists Anthony Lewis and William Safire, who rarely agree in print, joined Rosenthal in deploring the new rules. Ironically, the *Times* itself was soon criticized for sending presidential candidates a questionnaire asking for lists of their friends and waivers of privacy rights in police investigations. Meanwhile, the network news ran a picture of Donna Rice sitting in Gary Hart's lap during a pleasure cruise. The picture came from the *National Enquirer*.

The issue of media responsibility did not entirely fade away with the beginning of the election year. Dan Rather's celebrated interview of George Bush on January 25 provided new fuel to those who argued that the media were irresponsible. Bush's supporters seconded his observation, "If this is a political profile for an election, then I have a very different idea of what one should be." Bush's Iowa campaign manager was more direct: "He was unfairly set upon by Dan Rather in the functional equivalent of a media mugging."

The public reaction was more ambiguous. A Times Mirror/ Gallup survey found an even split as to whether Rather had conducted the interview fairly. A *Newsweek* poll also revealed a dead heat on the issue of whether he had been too aggressive. Ironically, the imbroglio may have hurt Rather more than it helped Bush. The vice president failed to gain support in Iowa after the interview, but Rather's favorability rating dropped 7 percent in a national poll, continuing what the pollsters termed "an unprecedented decline in anchorman image" of eighteen points since April 1987.[5]

Although the debate over the media faded as the real campaign began, sources remained heavily negative on questions of media responsibility. In 1988 nearly two-thirds of the thirty-five sources who expressed an opinion accused the media of some sort of irresponsible action. The string of campaign controversies may have hurt the public image of television news in general, as well as Dan Rather in particular. Between 1985 and 1988 the proportion of the public expressing "very favorable" opinions about network news has been cut in half. It fell from 25 percent in 1985 to 19 percent in late 1987 to only 12 percent after the Bush-Rather interview. As media analysts Michael Robinson and Margaret Petrella concluded, "In the end this sort of thing hurts the networks as much as the politicians."[6]

## Campaign Constants

Although most of the networks' attention focused on the races and the candidates, they turned occasionally to some other staples of campaign coverage.

**The Voter**. Only a handful of stories looked at the electorate in any detail. Most of those reports profiled the attitudes and concerns of voters as the campaign began. Special attention was paid to the voters of Iowa and New Hampshire. One theme that occurred sporadically throughout the campaign was the dissatisfaction that some voters, particularly Democratic voters, had with their electoral choices. Although the theme was discussed on thirteen separate occasions, no source ever argued that voters were pleased with their choices for president in 1988.

**Reagan and the Election.** Although few stories provided a lengthy discussion of President Reagan's role in the campaign, his ability to help or hinder the candidates was noted with some frequency. Of the forty-eight sources who raised the issue, 58 percent argued that a link to Reagan was an asset in the quest for the presidency. Most of these viewpoints were given by sources analyzing the Republican contest in general, and George Bush's candidacy in particular. On the day of the New Hampshire vote, for example, NBC's Lisa Meyers noted, "Bush was helped here by the popularity of Ronald Reagan." A month earlier, ABC's Jackie Judd offered an analysis of how Reagan could aid candidates: "Dole and Bush grab onto the coattails of Reaganomics, hoping that pocketbook issues, inflation, and jobs are more powerful than the deficit."

Before the Iowa caucuses, however, 71 percent of sources with an opinion asserted that a link to Reagan was a detriment, and only 29 percent thought such ties helpful. The major reason for the subsequent turnaround was that Midwesterners in general, and Iowans in particular, were displeased with Reagan administration farm policy. After the Iowa caucuses, the Republican campaign moved to New Hampshire and the South, where Reagan remained a popular figure. Sources then agreed on the value of a Reagan connection. Only after New York, when pundits began contemplating a Bush-Dukakis race, was Reagan once again portrayed more often as an albatross.

**The Conventions.** Although the conventions themselves were not really topics of discussion in campaign coverage, there was speculation about the prospects for a "brokered" Democratic convention. Sixty percent of all sources argued that a brokered convention was likely, with another 20 percent arguing that it was possible. Only 20 percent dismissed the idea as unlikely. Most of this speculation occurred between Super Tuesday and the Wisconsin primary, when the Dukakis campaign appeared particularly vulnerable to upset by the Jackson campaign. Over three-quarters of all sources who discussed the issue during that time argued that a brokered convention was likely. After Dukakis's New York win, discussion of a brokered convention ceased.

**The General Election**. Finally, fewer than 3 percent of all stories before the New York primary looked ahead to the general election campaign. This focus on the contest of the moment continued until Dukakis and Bush emerged as inevitable nominees. After New York, 27 percent of election stories focused on the fall contest rather than on the nomination races and remaining primaries. Most of these stories concerned strategy and tactics and early poll projections of a two-man race.

Occasional prognostication about the fall campaign began in 1987, however, and continued sporadically throughout the primaries. Republicans were given an edge until New York, with 50 percent of those sources who had an opinion predicting a GOP victory. In contrast, only 23 percent of network sources predicted a Democratic victory. The remaining 27 percent declared that the race was either too close to call, or it was too early to make predictions. After the New York primary, we found no sources who were willing to predict a victory for one party or the other.

## Election Wrap-Up

The networks brought together some old reliables and a few new wrinkles for their coverage of the 1988 election. As usual, the coverage was massive and ubiquitous yet skewed in ways that have provoked the ire of critics in the past. There were myriad stories on the contest aspects of the election but far fewer on the issues presumably being fought over. There was plenty of coverage to go around, yet it somehow never got around to many of the state contests, concentrating instead on the usual beneficiaries--Iowa and New Hampshire. The clearest bias in election news was not for one party or one candidate over another but for those two states over all others.

Super Tuesday was supposed to counter the networks' frontloading frenzy by creating a new "media event"--a huge regional primary that would command the camera's attention. Instead it created a vast field of frenetic electioneering that nearly overloaded the circuits of campaign journalism. For all the flexing of political muscle from south of the Mason-Dixon line, it was that old standby New Hampshire that gave the two eventual nominees a highly publicized boost toward the top. Moreover, 1988 was the year that Iowa passed even New Hampshire at the head of the media parade. Another sign of the lengthening campaign is the number of election stories--more than one per night, on average, during calendar year 1987--before the start of the primary season.

Despite the predominance of horse-race news and campaign issues, the networks found time to air considerable discussions of policy issues. Coverage of the issues tended to follow the candidates' agendas, not those of the journalists. For example, the Iran-contra affair remained in the news largely because of the battle for the Republican nomination. It became another front upon which to attack front-runner George Bush. Economic issues formed the most frequently discussed policy area in the campaign. Taxes, unemployment, and trade were the major points of debate. In the past two elections, it has been Republicans who have used the economy as a steppingstone to the White House. In campaign '88, Republicans rarely brought up the current healthy state of the economy, focusing instead on foreign policy. Democrats concentrated on economic problems like unemployment, trade, and budget deficits to round up votes. It may be no coincidence that recent polls find a disjunction between public optimism about one's personal financial outlooks and pessimism about the nation's economic prospects.

Yet the 1988 campaign is less likely to be remembered for its debates over taxes and trade than for the Gary Hart soap opera, the Biden blow-up, and the Bush-Rather wrestling match. In short, the media issues, not the policy issues, gave the campaign its essential flavor and most memorable moments. The media have become inextricably integrated into the campaign process. The decisions to stake out Gary Hart, to air the anti-Biden "attack" video, and to confront George Bush over Iran-contra in an alleged ambush interview were news decisions; but they were also political decisions in the sense that their predictable consequences may dramatically alter the course of the campaign.

In this sense the 1988 primary campaign added at least one new dimension to the relationship between the media and elections. Scholars have long noted the rising importance of media events--events staged for the media and dependent on media coverage for their impact, ranging from televised debates to the Iowa caucuses. Michael Robinson has added the concept of "mediality," by which he means those occurrences that, through their media treatment, unexpectedly get blown up out of proportion to their intrinsic importance. An example is Gerald Ford's 1976 gaffe in denying Soviet domination over Eastern Europe or the media's sudden discovery of Reagan's incipient senility after his poor debate performance in 1984.

The Hart, Biden, and Bush disputes were different. In each case the role of the media was itself a major part of the controversy. Thus, the appropriateness of journalistic behavior involved in getting the story itself became part of the story. This kind of media issue goes well beyond media events and medialities. It represents a new phase of the media's active intervention in the race. Reporting the news has merged with making the news.

## Notes

1. William C. Adams, "As New Hampshire Goes. . .," in Gary Orren and Nelson Polsby, eds., *Media and Momentum* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1988), pp. 42-59.
2. Thomas Patterson, *The Mass Media Election* (New York: Praeger, 1980).

3. Michael J. Robinson and Margaret Sheehan, *Over the Wire and on TV* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983).

4. Maura Clancey and Michael J. Robinson, "General Election Coverage: Part I," *Public Opinion*, December/January 1985.

5. Michael J. Robinson and Margaret Petrella, "Who Won the George Bush-Dan Rather Debate?" *Public Opinion*, March/April 1988, p. 44.

6. Ibid., p. 45.

# 3

# Calling the Horse Race

*There is nothing wrong with the media's treating the campaign as a horse race, but there is something bizarre about the rules they have created to regulate the race.*

--Charles Krauthammer
*The Washington Post*

Election coverage is concerned less with measuring the candidates' qualifications for the job than with predicting their chances of winning it. Discussions of a candidate's potential for success are based on a mixture of objective facts and subjective interpretations. These calculations play a formidable role in establishing the perception of viability (or its absence) in the public mind.

Television's focus on the competitive aspects of elections is a widely recognized fact of campaign news coverage. This tendency reflects the medium's inclination to report on election contests in much the same way that it reports on sporting events. The election becomes a competition where winning and losing are the big story.

Recognizing that horse-race predictions can become self-fulfilling prophecies, candidates develop strategies to mold journalists' expectations. Campaign spokesmen regularly underestimate their candidates' likely performance in upcoming contests, while hyping their rivals' prospects. In the face of these self-interested projections, political correspondents frequently rely on their own expertise, as well as that of outside analysts, to call the race.

This mutual effort to stay one step ahead of the horse race has its comical aspects. Candidates and correspondents come to resemble a couple lurching about on the dance floor, out of step with the music because neither is willing to let the other lead. The *Washington Post*'s Paul Taylor complains, "The whole process has become unbelievably circular. A reporter asks a politician if Event X is going to be important. The politician asks, 'Are you going to report it as important?' The reporter says, 'I asked you first.'"[1]

## The Racing Form

In addition to simple indicators of who is ahead and who is behind, horse-race coverage includes complex judgments about momentum, status, potential, and the structural bases of each campaign. Our content analysis examined this more complex formulation of horse-race reporting by handicapping the race--assessing the field, examining weaknesses, exploring potential, and recapping the record to better judge each entrant.

We examined four aspects of horse-race coverage: (1) the organizational and financial base of support for the campaign; (2) indications of public support apart from actual voting; (3) each candidate's electoral performance; and (4) the subjective prognostications of pundits and analysts.

**Organization and Finances.** A campaign's organizational structure and financial resources form the structural base of a run for the White House. Organizational strength is not a sufficient condition for electoral success, but it is widely regarded as a necessary one. Therefore, evaluations of the candidates' organizations provide early indicators of their eventual electoral prowess.

Similarly, the candidates' relative financial standing is important in evaluating their long-term viability. Lack of money can spell failure in this era of multimillion-dollar, high-tech, attack-video campaigns. Yet, as with organization, strong financial standing only provides the candidate with the necessary tools to wage a modern campaign. More barriers must be surmounted before victory is ensured.

Evaluations of these structural elements are largely based on facts and events, with only a minimal amount of interpretation. Negative audits of the structural base, however, can result in more pessimistic evaluations in the more subjective areas of the horse race. We examined all explicit evaluations of the strength of each candidate's organization and finances.

**Public Support.** Placement and movement in the polls are prospective measures of public support. Although they are largely untested indications of voter sentiment, they are the most common bases for evaluating a candidate's potential. Polls conducted by the television networks, newspapers, news magazines, the campaigns themselves, and a multitude of other groups produce a plethora of polling data that provide an almost daily snapshot of the campaign. The results of many of these polls were reported on the network news. In fact, 30 percent of all election stories included the results of public opinion polls. We coded whether the candidate placed in the upper or lower half of candidates in the poll and whether he was said to be rising or falling in the polls.

The demographic groups that support each candidate are often reported in an attempt to explain or analyze a candidate's appeal, or to assess his limits. NBC anchor Tom Brokaw gave a typical rundown of support groups after the New Hampshire primary: "Gephardt was doing better among blue collar workers, union members, conservatives, and older voters. Simon was doing better among white collar voters, the well-educated, younger, and liberal Democrats." We coded any statements that identified groups who were said to support a particular candidate.

**Votes and Delegates.** Although polls provide a rough indication of public reaction, what ultimately matters are actual votes. Reports of winning or losing contests, popular vote totals, and accumulation of delegates are all measures of success or failure in the struggle to win the nomination. These form the candidate's electoral track record. We noted all reporters' statements that identified candidates as winners or losers. We also coded who was said to be leading or trailing in the accumulation of popular votes. Finally, we noted whether a candidate was said to lead or trail in the race for delegates.

**Expectations**. Performing well in primaries and caucuses is not always enough. Candidates are also required to meet more subjective criteria, such as living up to "expectations." Expectations for future performance are usually based on past performance, indications of public support, and the intuitive judgments of reporters, outside analysts, and the candidates themselves.

Candidates' finishes are interpreted in light of vote or delegate totals and also in terms of meeting prior expectations and setting new ones. The secret is not only to win a state, but to finish better than expected, so the victory (or moral victory) draws enough media attention to excite funders and followers. Before campaigns begin, politicians try to catch the eye of the apocryphal Great Mentioner who anoints the lucky few as presidential timber in columns and news stories (as in, "Bill Bradley is being mentioned as a hot prospect"). Once the campaign

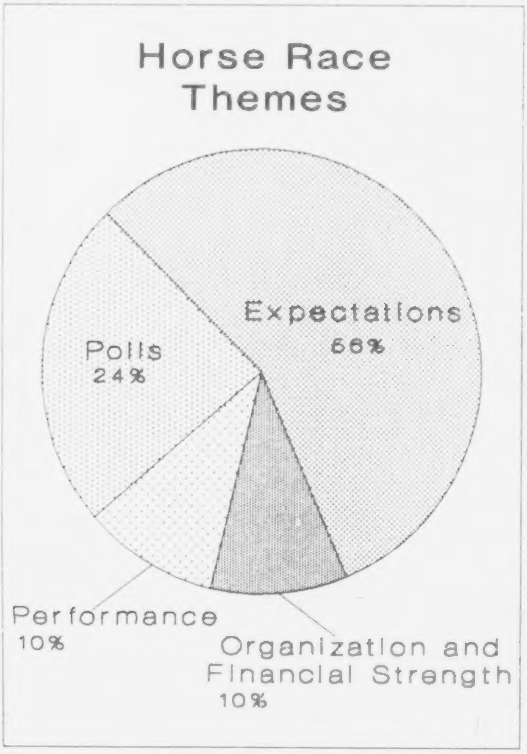


*Figure 3-1.*

starts, it is the Great Expecter who can determine a candidate's fate, by deciding that a fourth-place primary finish was a moral victory because it exceeded expectations, while a first-place finish was really a loss, because the margin of victory was disappointing.

Candidates have been wary of the Great Expecter ever since Eugene McCarthy "won" the 1968 New Hampshire primary by finishing a stronger second than the pundits had predicted. So it was not surprising that a Bush staffer this spring would collar a reporter to ask, "How well do we have to do for you to declare it a victory on Super Tuesday? Let's say we win a majority of the delegates, and we take ten out of seventeen states. Will that be enough?"[2]

Another partly subjective evaluation is the decision to label one candidate the front-runner. Front-runner status may produce a bandwagon effect, but it also brings greater scrutiny from the press and more vehement opposition from rivals. To raise their own profiles, rival candidates concentrate their debate attacks and campaign ads on the front-runner. Media attention provides more in-depth analysis of a front-runner's policies and personality, in order to more rigorously measure likely winners of the race.

We noted all positive, negative, and mixed evaluations of candidates' expectations provided by sources and reporters. An evaluation was coded positively when the candidate was said to have done as well as expected or better than expected. An evaluation was coded negatively when he was said to have performed more poorly than predicted. We also coded whether the candidate was expected to fare well or poorly in his future contests. Finally, we noted how often each candidate was labeled a front-runner or a longshot.

## Off to the Races

These four aspects of the horse race produce a composite portrait of the campaign contest. The last of these--expectations--seems both the most important and most subjective aspect of horse-race coverage. Evaluations of past performance and expectations for future performance accounted for a solid majority of all horse-race judgments (see figure 3-1).

By contrast, polling data accounted for only about half as much coverage as the expectations game. Polls drew the most attention immediately before and during the crucial early state contests. Voting and delegate totals made up only about one-tenth of all horse-race judgments. The structural bases of the campaign--organizational ability and financial status--accounted for another tenth of the coverage, but their importance varied from candidate to candidate.

Reporters were the principal handicappers of the race. Outside analysts provided only a small proportion of the judgments. Differences between the Republican and Democratic contests were slight, with reporters rendering 77 percent of the horse-race judgments for Democrats and 70 percent for the Republicans.

## The Democrats

A distinguishing feature of the 1987-1988 Democratic race was its early lack of structure and predictability. Before the primary season began, the Democratic field was widely deprecated for its perceived lack of stature. More important, none of the "seven dwarfs" was able to sustain his front-runner status for longer than a few weeks. At some point in 1987, four candidates briefly claimed the status of front-runner (Hart in April, Gephardt in June, Jackson in August, Simon in October, and Hart again in December). None, however, managed to retain the title very long, and the nomination contest remained undecided well into the primary season. This fluidity made it especially difficult to rate dark-horse contenders. The odds were changed continually, even after the entrants were out of the gate.

**In the Media Spotlight.** The changing odds were mirrored in the shifting balance of coverage within the Democratic field. To measure the amount of media exposure each candidate received, we calculated the number of times he appeared or was cited as a source.

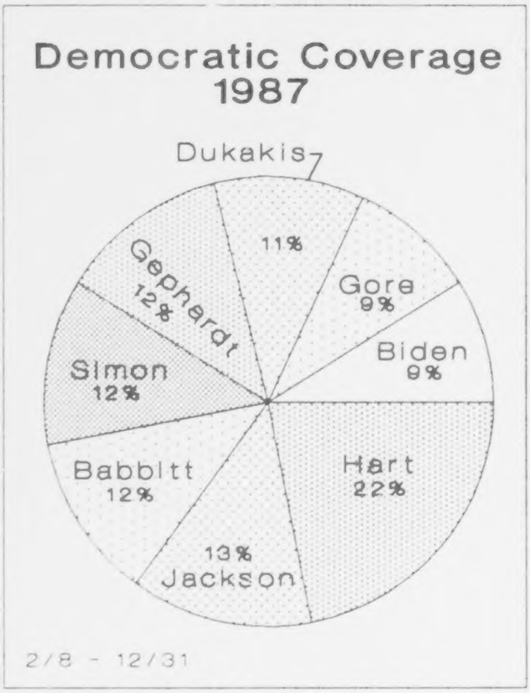


*Figure 3-2.*

In 1987 Gary Hart accounted for one-fifth of the Democratic citations, most of which were connected not to his rise but to his downfall. The remaining citations were split about evenly among the major Democratic candidates (see figure 3-2). Jesse Jackson, Paul Simon, and Bruce Babbitt each accounted for about one-eighth of the Democratic coverage. Dick Gephardt and Michael Dukakis each received slightly less. Al Gore and Joe Biden split the remainder. If Hart's unusually high level of coverage is discounted, the main contenders received an equal share of the media attention in the eight-man primary race. Since all but Jesse Jackson were relatively unknown quantities in the presidential sweepstakes, each had his proverbial fifteen minutes of fame.

As the primary season kicked off in Iowa, the coverage shifted to reflect expectations of future performance (see figure 3-3). Gephardt was featured in just over 20 percent of the Democratic mentions, closely followed by Simon. Dukakis finished third with 15 percent of the coverage. Media coverage of the candidates going into New Hampshire reflected their Iowa performances. Gephardt, the Iowa winner, accounted for 24 percent of the New Hampshire coverage. The second-place finisher in

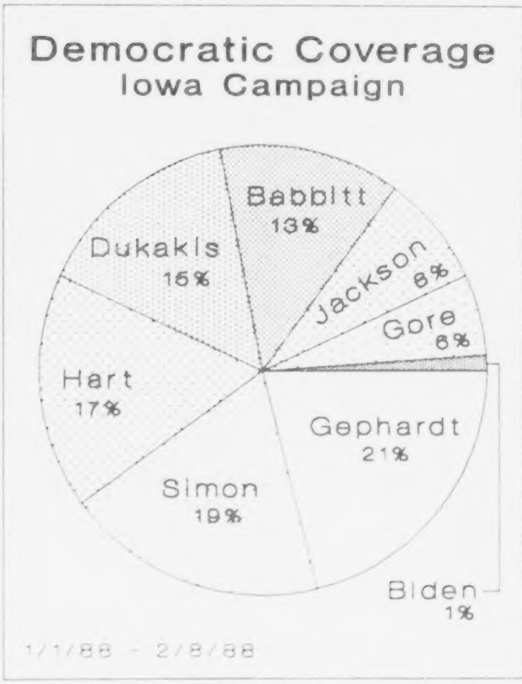


*Figure 3-3.*

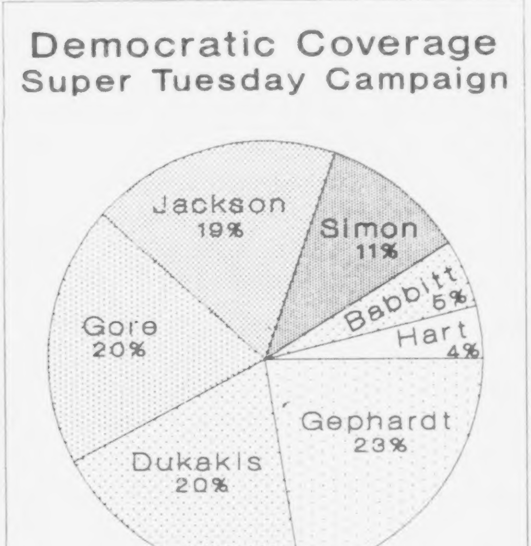
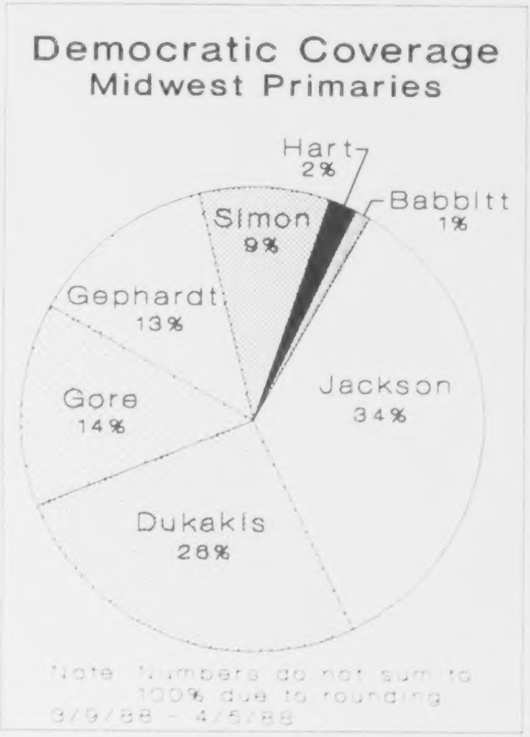


*Figure 3-4.*

Iowa, Simon, also finished second in media attention with 23 percent of the citations. Despite his high expectations and subsequent victory in New Hampshire, Dukakis finished third in the media race there.

Coverage of Super Tuesday reflected a widening of the race back to a five-man field of serious contenders (see figure 3-4). Gephardt still led in media attention, drawing nearly one quarter of the source references. Dukakis and the reintroduced Albert Gore each received one fifth of the Democratic citations. Jackson followed close behind, while Simon fell to a distant fifth place. After Super Tuesday the coverage focused on what was becoming a two-man race (see figure 3-5). Jackson and Dukakis together accounted for three-fifths of all candidate appearances during the Midwest primaries that got most of the media attention. Gore and Gephardt trailed well behind.


Democratic Coverage
Midwest Primaries

Note: Numbers do not sum to 100% due to rounding
3/9/88 - 4/5/88

*Figure 3-5.*

The New York primary brought a brief surge of attention to Gore. He and Jackson each garnered a third of the candidate citations during the New York campaign, while Dukakis followed close behind. In the stretch drive to California, Dukakis and Jackson ran neck and neck in their quest for the camera's attention. Dukakis received only slightly more coverage than Jackson after New York (50 to 47 percent), despite his status as nominee-in-waiting.

**War Chests and Soldiers**. Since the unstructured Democratic race offered little basis for preliminary evaluations, reporters paid attention to indicators that had played an important role in past campaigns. Organizational strength (the ability of a candidate to organize his troops and run his campaign efficiently) is a critical asset early in the race. The ability to buy media time and meet campaign bills are the usual evidence of financial strength. Both organization is financial resources are evaluated according to comparisons with other candidates in the race.

The media consistently gave Dukakis the highest marks of any Democratic contender for organizational ability and financial standing. In addition to receiving more evaluations in these categories than any other candidate, he received no negative evaluations of either his organization or his financial standing during the entire campaign.

After New Hampshire, ABC's Jim Wooten noted that the Massachusetts governor had an edge over the other candidates, calling his organization "first rate," and noting, "He has plenty of money, more than anyone else." After Super Tuesday, NBC's Jim Cummings offered the now standard line on Dukakis: "He has a better organization than his opponents, more money, and he's won in more states." Such positive remarks about Dukakis's campaign assets reflected the widespread view that he had a clear advantage.

No candidate could have provided a more vivid contrast to the machine-like efficiency of the Dukakis campaign than Gary Hart's one-man show (see figure 3-6). When negative evaluations of a candidate's organization and finances are subtracted from positive evaluations, the resulting net score shows Dukakis clearly ahead of the field and Hart almost as far behind. Hart never enjoyed positive evaluations of his structural base, particularly after he reentered the race in December. During 1987 and 1988, evaluations of his

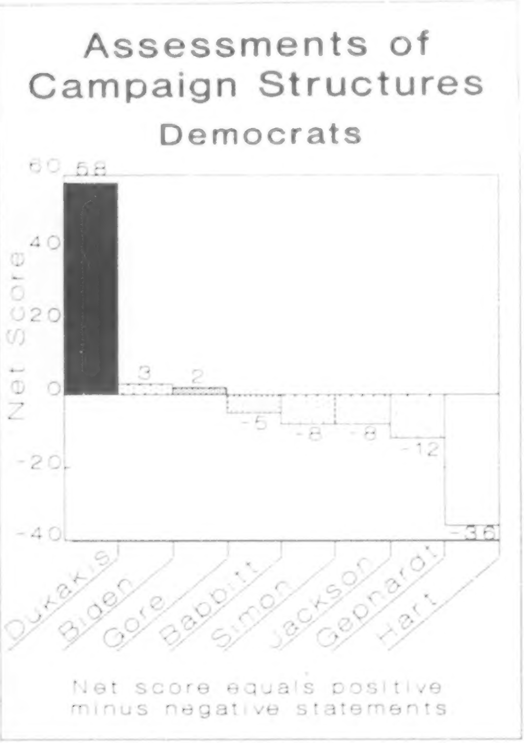


Figure 3-6.

organization and financial ability ran four-to-one negative, until he finally withdrew from the race in March.

Hart was a general without troops after his reentry into the race. His lack of a campaign staff was widely viewed as an insurmountable handicap. In a different context it might have made Hart look like a scrappy underdog, but given his uniquely self-destructive campaign, it just looked foolish. His longstanding debt burden from the 1984 campaign had been an obstacle from the outset of his 1988 bid. Hart's acknowledgment that his campaign treasury consisted of his pocket change, while amusing, lowered his prospects even further.

**Testing the Wind**. More important in assessing the candidates' prospects are public opinion polls. Opinion polling for 1988 began soon after the 1984 election concluded, and it played a significant role in the coverage from the outset. Polls pitted candidates (and potential candidates) against each other in every possible combination in an effort to discern voter preferences. News about opinion polls reflected positively on Dukakis at every point in the campaign. He usually placed in the upper tier of candidates and moved steadily up the preference ladder (see figure 3-7).

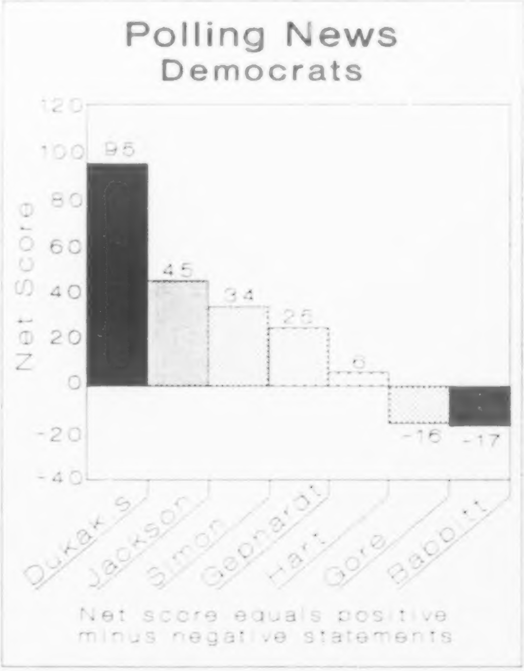


*Figure 3-7.*

Jackson trailed Dukakis in positive polling news, although he too received high marks for his strong placement. Only before the Iowa and New Hampshire races did polls place Jackson back in the pack. He led the field during the preseason, before Super Tuesday, and during the series of Midwestern primaries (see figure 3-8). After the New York primary, however, Jackson again slipped back, as most polls showed him losing two-man races to front-runner Dukakis. This slip brought his overall polling score down, but he finished the season with a better score than his competitors.

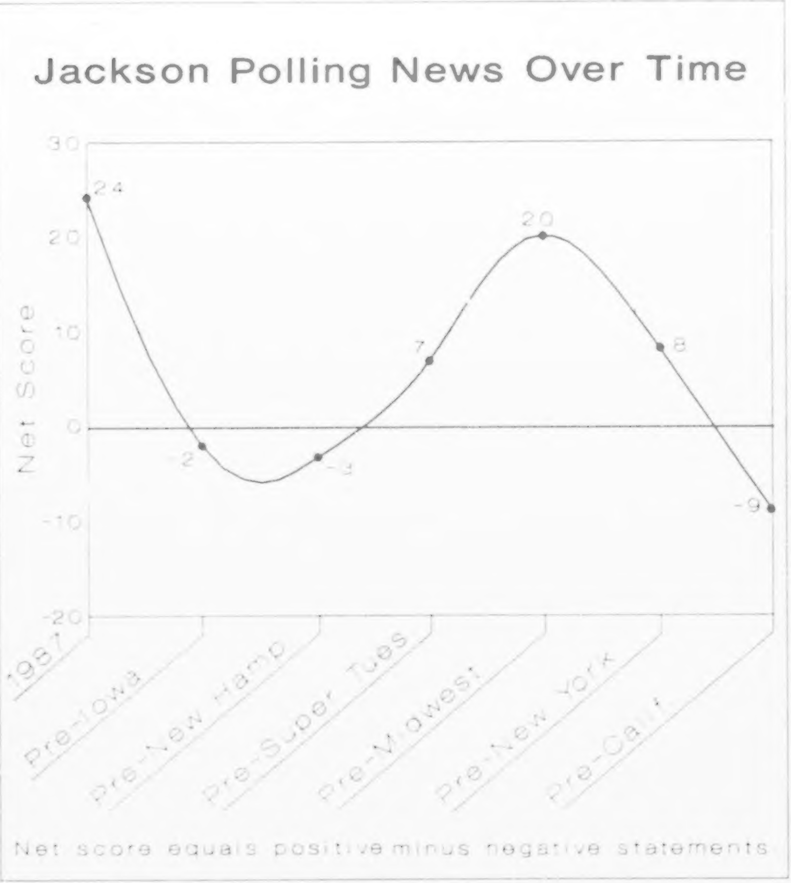


*Figure 3-8.*

Gary Hart represents an odd phenomenon in polling news. He held the lead in polls in early 1987 and continued to place in the upper tier of candidates throughout the year. Hart continued to place high in the polls even into the early days of 1988, until his lead dissolved just before the Iowa caucuses. But Hart's continued high standing was offset by reports of his downward movement in the polls (see figure 3-9). Before the disclosure of the Donna Rice affair, Hart led other Democrats by almost fifty points in some preference polls. That lead shrank and then disappeared, until he finally trailed his competitors on the eve of the Iowa caucuses.

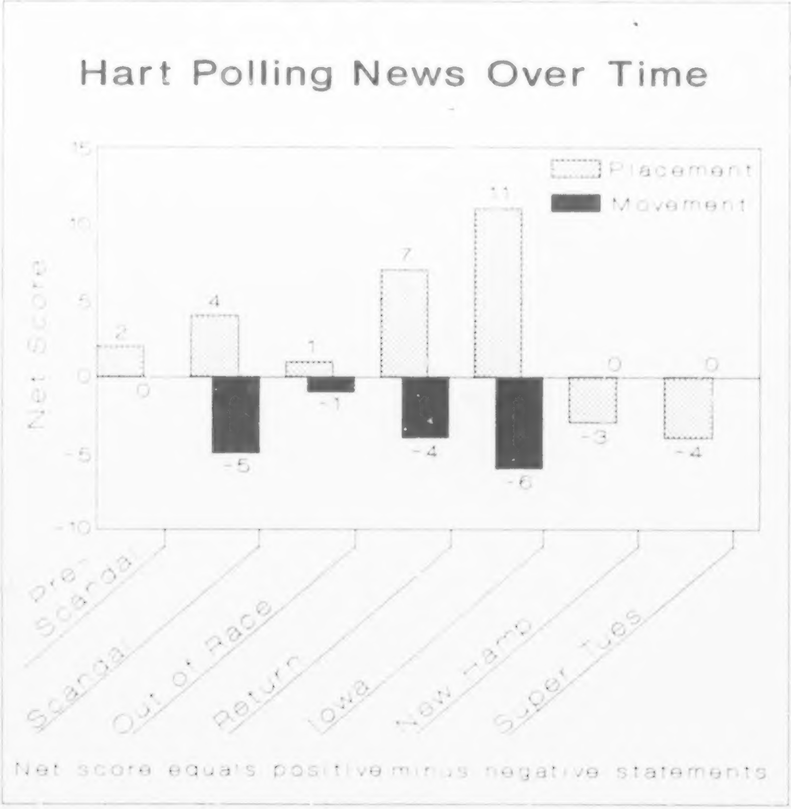


*Figure 3-9.*

Few of the Democratic candidates were identified repeatedly as the choice of demographic groups. The one exception was Jesse Jackson, who was consistently identified as having black support. Throughout the campaign, forty-two separate television statements affirmed his support by the black community. This support had its greatest impact on the evaluation of his Super Tuesday prospects, where a large and active black constituency was thought to help Jackson. As ABC's Richard Threlkeld summed up, "On Super Tuesday, the Southern bloc of 8 million black voters will give Jackson real clout at the Democratic convention." Identification of this group also put Jackson's performance in context. For example, Jackson garnered a better-than-expected rating in Maine, given the largely white population, while drawing 31 percent of the vote.

**Putting it to the Test**. The candidates' actual performance in the various contests plays a major role in assessments of their future prospects. Winning the popular vote and acquiring delegates are clear indicators of success that require little interpretation. Still, reporters make independent decisions about which victories to report and how often to repeat news of a victory. They may even get it wrong, as ABC did in initially reporting a Dukakis victory in Michigan (actually a big win for Jackson).

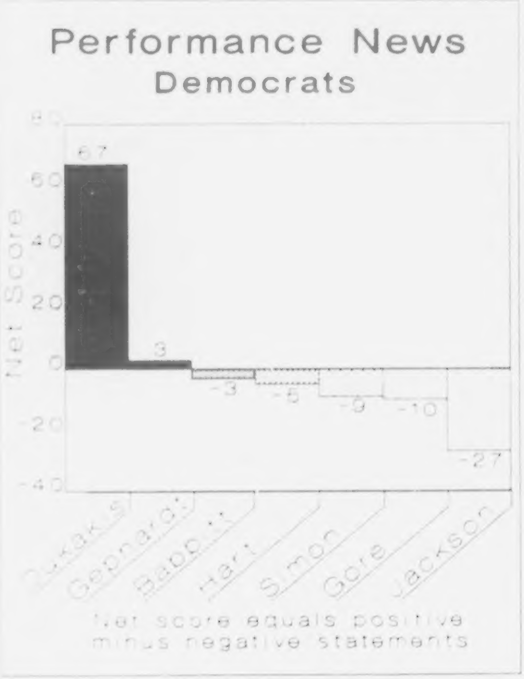


*Figure 3-10.*

We have already seen how coverage of the various contests differed dramatically in amount and intensity. The candidates' success or failure in a primary state takes on new meaning against the unevenly weighted backdrop of coverage. Gephardt's early win in Iowa received disproportionate attention, and he was identified as a winner a half-dozen times before the New Hampshire primary. This total slightly exceeded the number of references to

Dukakis's victory in New Hampshire, the next big contest. Another four mentions after Gephardt's other early victory, in South Dakota, reinforced his identification as a winner. His early victorious appearance may have helped prolong serious consideration of Gephardt as a contender, but it was greatly overshadowed by Dukakis's actual performance (see figure 3-10).

**The Expectations Race**. The most significant element of horse-race coverage is the evaluation of a candidate's potential by analysts and pundits. A candidate's actual performance is weighed against what the handicappers thought he would do before the voting started. Expectations are set for future contests, as analysts decide what new performance levels the candidate must meet if he is to be considered successful in the race. These judgments are the bailiwick of journalists, the domain of the analysts and observers who generate what becomes the conventional wisdom about the horse race.

ABC's Jim Wooten highlighted just how important analysts' expectations can be on the day of the New Hampshire primary: "Dukakis's worries were of winning by less than predicted. And he tries to be cautious about the race. Because of perceptions, Governor Dukakis is probably wise to be cautious. As Ed Muskie might remind him, you can win here and still lose, or as Senator McGovern might remember, you can lose here and still win."

The handicappers gave positive marks to four of the Democrats and failing grades to four others (see figure 3-11). But these overall figures mask the changing shape of the Democratic race over time. The contender with the best "expectations press" before the Iowa caucuses (Gephardt) was not even around for the California race.

In the preseason, Gore and Jackson vied for the best horse-race prognostications. Counting only positive and negative evaluations, Jackson had more than Gore, and they ran 85 percent positive. Gore had the fewest evaluations of any candidate, but

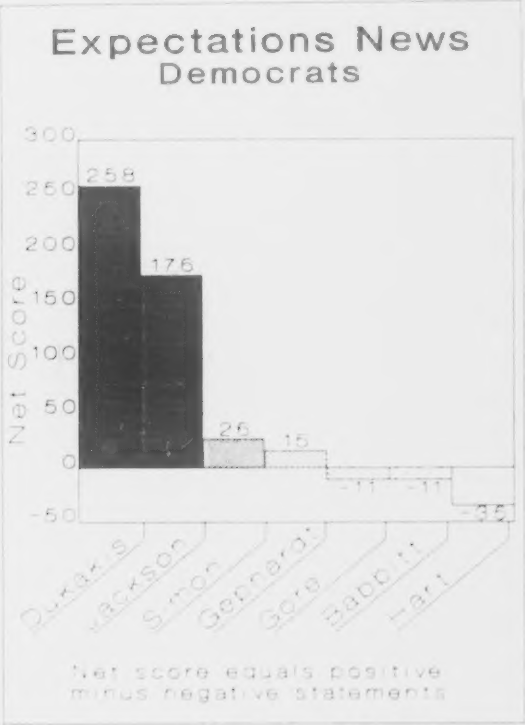


*Figure 3-11.*

they ran 86 percent positive. Dukakis and Gephardt had about the same number of evaluations and were rated similarly, Dukakis receiving 79 percent positive evaluations, Gephardt 68 percent. Simon followed with a 65 percent positive rating.

This distribution of positive ratings changes if we remove the candidates' self-evaluations. If we consider only reporters' evaluations, Jackson led with 77 percent positive evaluations, and Dukakis moved up to second with a 70 percent positive rating. When we ignore Gore's self-evaluations and look only at the opinions of reporters, he dropped to a 67 percent positive rating. But the real loser was Gephardt, whose overall two-to-one positive rating fell to two-to-one negative in the eyes of reporters.

After the first of the year, Gephardt took the lead in the perception race by receiving positive evaluations from an unbeatable 100 percent of television reports. (Again, this figure excludes mixed assessments.) Dukakis and Simon vied for second place, each receiving 89 percent positive evaluations. Because Gore had temporarily taken himself out of the race, he was effectively no longer evaluated. Jackson slipped to a 50-50 assessment of his prospects--not surprisingly, since no one had ever considered Iowa a Jackson stronghold.

These positive and negative evaluations were only part of the story in Iowa. Many handicappers hedged their bets and rendered mixed evaluations of candidates' prospects. As Peter Jennings observed, "Among both Democrats and Republicans, confident predictions of what is going to happen here are as scarce as a warm Iowa day in February." The closeness of the race was noted by Jim Wooten: "And yet, on the night of this first decision, they're still without a genuine front-runner--still three of these fellows bunched up so close you could throw a blanket over them all." When mixed assessments were included, Gephardt dropped to 59 percent positive, with the remainder rendering mixed evaluations. Simon followed with 53 percent positive and 41 percent mixed evaluations. Dukakis slipped further behind, with 42 percent positive evaluations and 55 percent mixed.

These rankings might seem a mere reiteration of poll results were it not for the unusual case of Gary Hart. Hart placed high in the polls of 1987 and continued to show well early in 1988. The handicappers overlooked those results to make (what appear in hindsight to be) more realistic evaluations. Network analysts were negative on Hart in 1987 (45 percent positive to 55 percent negative) and even more strongly negative during the Iowa campaign (24 percent to 76 percent).

New Hampshire was a different story, with the focus on the number-two spot. Dukakis was seen to have it sewn up, and New Hampshire was referred to as "his own backyard." The networks did not report a single negative evaluation of his horse-race prospects. The debate was over who would win second place. Comparing just positive and negative evaluations, Simon and Gephardt emerged at the top (83 percent and 80 percent positive, respectively). These evaluations were far from unanimous, since more than three-quarters of Simon's horse-race evaluations were mixed, as were more than three-fifths of Gephardt's. Thus uncertainty remained a byword of the early contests.

Super Tuesday was a different story. It was very much a two-man race in the eyes of the handicappers. The clear evaluations came out 96 percent positive for Jackson and 97 percent positive for Dukakis. Both candidates received relatively few mixed assessments. Gephardt came in third, at 69 percent positive. There was greater uncertainty over his prospects, however, if all evaluations are considered. Thirty percent of his evaluations were mixed, while 39 percent were positive. The late-starting, self-proclaimed son of the South, Al Gore, did not impress the handicappers. Reporters provided 80 percent mixed evaluations of his prospects. When expressing a clear opinion, they were two-to-one negative. Gore and his staff accounted for three-quarters of his positive evaluations.

The Midwest primaries were a watershed for the remaining Democratic hopefuls. Simon and Gephardt pinned their last hopes on strong showings in these states. But the analysts' favorite coming into these races was Jackson. Of the 111 positive and negative evaluations of his potential, 92 percent were positive. Simon and Dukakis trailed well behind, with positive evaluations twenty percentage points below the leader. This pairing is somewhat misleading, since Simon had only twenty positive or negative evaluations during this period, compared with ninety-nine for Dukakis. Gephardt had become an also-ran in the eyes of the pundits, to the extent that nine out of ten evaluations by reporters were negative. Gephardt and his staff themselves provided 80 percent of his positive evaluations during this period.

From the New York campaign through the California contest, the pundits climbed on the Dukakis bandwagon. Jackson, while rated far behind Dukakis, was not entirely written off. Until the end of the primary season, his evaluations remained slightly more positive than negative (56 percent positive through the closing months of the campaign). Jackson's mixed evaluations increased from 35 percent in the Midwest to 40 percent during the New York campaign and 43 percent afterward.

Gore was given little benefit of the doubt. Although he received largely balanced evaluations in the Midwest, things went sharply downhill for him thereafter. During the New York race, negative evaluations of his chances outweighed positive ones by a two-to-one margin. (Yet analysts were unwilling to write him off completely. Forty-five percent of evaluations were mixed on his prospects in New York.)

The Democratic race began as a highly unstructured and unpredictable one, prompting analysts to base their evaluations on poll results and judgments of organization and financial strength. Organization and finances took on a lesser role as the contests began and real measures of success became available. As the campaign progressed, poll results continued to be closely related to evaluations of future prospects for most of the candidates, and the outcome of each race played a bigger part in predicting a candidate's future.

The interplay of these factors had the clearest effect on the candidacy of Albert Gore, since the Gore campaign decided to avoid the early contests in Iowa and New Hampshire. With little real indication of how Gore would perform, and with more clearly developed analysis of the other candidates, Gore received fewer evaluations than his competitors in all time periods before the Wisconsin primary. The evaluations he did receive lacked a clear direction, with positive and negative evaluations of his prospects evenly balanced until the end of the Midwest primaries. Only during the New York campaign, when his defeat appeared imminent, did a clear negative consensus emerge about Gore's campaign potential.

## The Republicans

The Republican contest was more highly structured and less apt to provide surprises. Like most nomination races since 1968, the 1988 race began with a clear front-runner and a limited number of potential challengers. With George Bush so clearly in the lead, and with Robert Dole widely regarded as his only strong challenger, the only remaining uncertainty was the role Pat Robertson would play.

For the Republicans, then, expectations were securely in place before the race got started. The uncertainty about Pat Robertson's potential support meant that his performance expectations had not solidified. So each new piece of information about Robertson's campaign abilities took on greater significance than it would have for the other candidates.

The distribution of coverage closely followed the candidates' rankings in public opinion polls conducted before the actual voting began (see figure 3-12). Once again, we measured the amount of coverage by tabulating the number of times each candidate was used as a source. Bush received by far the most attention, accounting for over one-third of the Republican citations. He led all rivals during preseason election coverage and managed to remain slightly ahead of Dole during the Iowa campaign. After Dole's withdrawal from the race, Bush received nearly all the Republican coverage.

Dole was a strong second, accounting for about a quarter of Republican citations. He received consistently less attention than Bush, but much more attention than any of his other GOP rivals. A notable exception to this pattern came in the weeks immediately after Super Tuesday. During that period, Dole became the focus of increased scrutiny as the death knell of his campaign began to sound throughout the political world. Dole's citations during this period formed 57 percent of the Republican total, nearly twice the level of attention given to Bush.

Together, then, front-runners Bush and Dole dominated the Republican contest, although their supremacy was challenged briefly by rival Pat Robertson. Robertson rated third in the amount of attention received from the networks, with about 18 percent of all Republican source mentions, but this varied markedly over the course of the primaries. Robertson's coverage lagged well behind that of the front-runners until the Iowa caucuses. After his surprise second-place finish there, his network exposure suddenly equaled that of Bush and Dole, and he actually surpassed them before Super Tuesday. His lack of success in the South Carolina primary and on Super Tuesday,

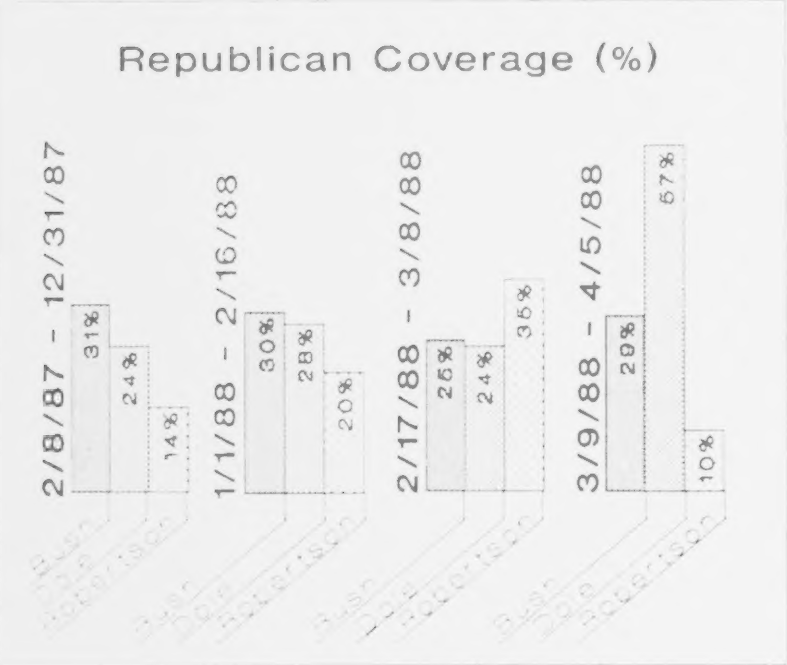


*Figure 3-12.*

however, led to a swift decline in the Robertson campaign's fortunes, and he received only minimal attention as the primary season wound down.

Throughout the entire campaign Robertson easily led rivals Kemp, Haig, and du Pont, all of whom received relatively little exposure. How hard was it for dark-horse candidates to attract the networks' attention? During the entire 1987 preseason, Pete du Pont made fewer appearances on the evening news than election analyst William Schneider of the American Enterprise Institute. Du Pont barely edged out Republican analyst Kevin Phillips and pollster Peter Hart in the networks' source race.

**Marshalling Forces.** During the early stages of the nomination race, reports focused mainly on the superior organizational and financial ability of George Bush and Pat Robertson. These positive statements were most numerous in the preseason, as pundits and analysts searched for tangible information to assist their evaluations of the coming contest. Discussions of the Dole campaign's structural base, in contrast, came largely at the end of his run for the nomination, when reporters conducted a post-mortem.

Bush, like Dukakis, received virtually unanimous praise for his organizational and financial strength. Even in the early part of 1987, before most of the candidates had even announced that they were running for president, Bush's organization earned favorable notices. NBC's Tom Pettit, for example, noting the vice president's efforts to rebuild his image in the wake of the Iran-contra scandal, reported on March 6, 1987, "In Iowa, Bush's organization is so good that this week he pulled off a whirlwind tour of seven Iowa cities, trying to bolster his sagging popularity."

Throughout the entire race, there were virtually no negative assessments of the Bush campaign's impressive structural base. The net score for each candidate on this horse-race theme, calculated by subtracting any explicitly negative assessments of his organizational ability or financial strength from the number of explicitly positive assessments is shown in figure 3-13.

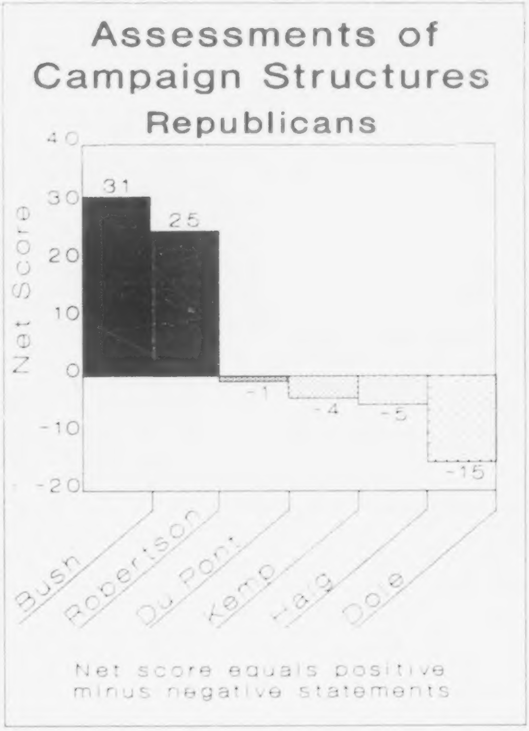


Figure 3-13.

Pat Robertson's organization received many positive reviews as well, and they formed a large portion of his total horse-race coverage. One out of every five assessments of Robertson's potential for success in 1987 dealt with his organization or financial status, and all were positive. Each network provided profiles of Robertson's Christian soldiers as they operated with machine-like precision in moving the candidate about the state of Iowa. Robertson himself even bragged in a CBS report last November, "I am going to build as good a grass-roots organization as there is in America." His exceptional fund-raising abilities also garnered much attention.

The focus on Robertson's campaign structure was so intensive because other factors were unlikely to provide much guidance. Without an electoral track record to provide clues as to his likely success, analyses of his campaign organization and financial base offered perhaps the best preseason indicator of Robertson's likely performance. Evaluations of his campaign structure became somewhat more negative after his fifth-place showing in New Hampshire, where Robertson himself conceded to CBS's Lesley Stahl that his organization was not as effective as his Iowa team had been. Robertson still managed to end the primary season with an 88 percent positive rating of his organizational and financial ability.

The only other candidate who received significant media attention regarding this horse-race theme was Kansas Senator Robert Dole. Unlike the other candidates, however, Dole's organization and financial standing received the most scrutiny after his campaign was virtually over. His organization and financial status seemed relatively unremarkable in the early stages of the campaign. They became noteworthy in retrospect as reporters tried to explain his sagging fortunes after New Hampshire.

Most sources blamed Dole's downturn at least partly on his failure to competently organize his campaign. As early as February 25, ABC's Brit Hume argued that the Dole campaign's firing of top aides David Keene and Donald Devine raised the question of "whether Dole can run an organization and delegate authority." Such arguments rapidly gained acceptance as the Dole campaign became, in the words of ABC's Peter Jennings, "a contradiction between reality and aspirations." Although most of the negative comments about Dole came in the last weeks of his campaign, three-fourths of all comments about the Dole campaign's structural bases were negative.

**The Most Stable Race.** The polling news reported about the Republican candidates fluctuated relatively little. Bush and Dole both held steady leads in a race that concluded quite early by historical standards. The brevity of the race allowed little opportunity for changes in the polling positions of the candidates.

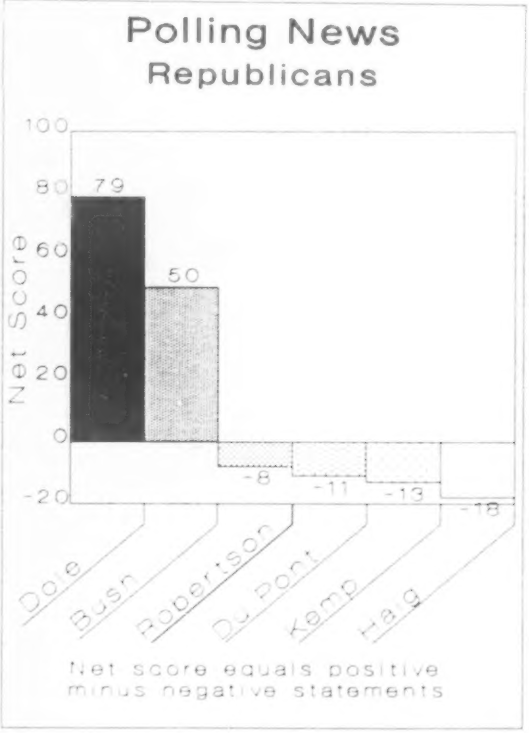


*Figure 3-14.*

Surprisingly, the leader in reporting on the polls was not Bush but Dole (see figure 3-14). During 1987, Dole placed a consistent second in a six-man field, and he led the pack in Iowa. After his solid victory there, Dole was the beneficiary of many positive polling reports, as he pulled ahead of Bush in New Hampshire. Only as the campaign headed into Super Tuesday and the Midwest did the first cracks begin to appear in Dole's polling image.

Bush's polling news was about as favorable as Dole's, but two important deviations from this pattern brought down his overall level of good news. First, after Bush lost the Iowa caucuses to Dole and Robertson, he slipped noticeably in New Hampshire tracking polls. This slippage was noted daily in network reports and provided much of the negative news about Bush's poll standing (see figure 3-15). Dan Rather noted three days after the Iowa caucuses that Bush's lead was "dropping like a rock in the Granite State," and he stated that Bush's hopes for winning the nomination were dropping just as rapidly. Such negative news about Bush's downward movement overshadowed the fact that he was still leading in most polls.

The second period of bad polling news for Bush occurred after he had already secured the Republican nomination. After he clinched the Republican prize, several news reports presented polls comparing Bush's likely general election performance with that of Democratic leader Mike Dukakis. After his New York primary victory, Dukakis overtook Bush in those polls, and subsequent negative polling news over the next several weeks led to a general deterioration in Bush's horse-race news.

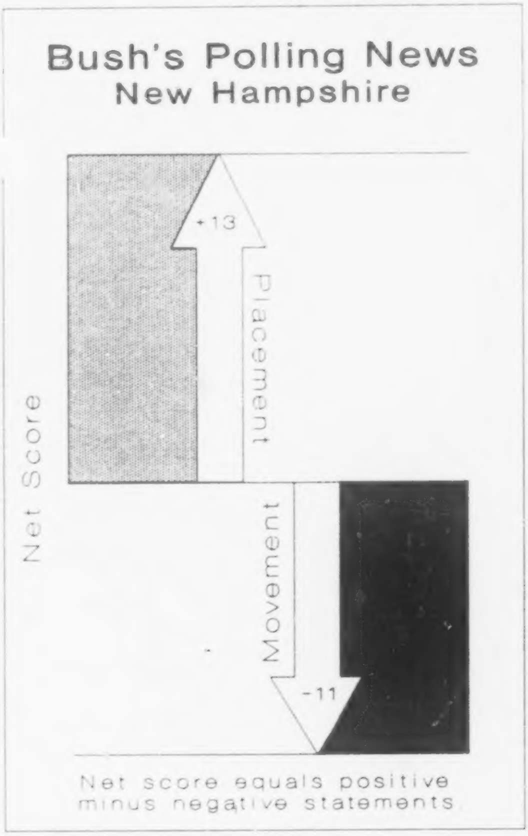


*Figure 3-15.*

Pat Robertson, however, never placed highly in actual polls, but two factors provided him with a more positive polling image than his position would have indicated. First, Robertson managed to supplant Kemp as the third Republican alternative during the Iowa campaign. This was quickly followed by reports after the Iowa caucuses that Robertson was rising in New Hampshire tracking polls.

Second, uncertainty about Robertson's actual level of support led to exaggerated estimates of his ability to garner increased support. Robertson was able to argue that the standard polls were not designed to tap into his "invisible army," since he was mobilizing people who traditionally had been largely apolitical. On the weekend before the New Hampshire vote, Robertson confided to CBS's Lesley Stahl, "I have a real good chance of going beyond third place. I'm sitting on a solid third right now, and moving." Robertson was indeed rising in the polls at that time, but CBS News/*New York Times* tracking polls show that Robertson began his climb in the low single digits and climbed only high enough to challenge also-ran Pete du Pont for fourth place.

Early evaluations of Robertson's prospects, however, were based partly on the presumption that the former televangelist had widespread evangelical support. Our content analysis showed that Robertson was linked to support from evangelical groups twenty-six times. Bush, Dole, and Kemp, in contrast, were each said to have such support only once. No other groups figured prominently in analyses of the Republican support base. The fact that Robertson lost this voting bloc to Bush in South Carolina may have played an even greater role in the rapid disintegration of his candidacy than his controversial campaign trail statements. Bush made much of this fact on NBC the day after the primary, boasting, "I got more votes in the evangelicals than he [Robertson] did in South Carolina." Once Robertson had been proven not to control the support base he had been previously ceded, network analysts wrote off his chances.

**Performance: The Ultimate Test**. For obvious reasons, George Bush dominated the news about electoral performance (see figure 3-16). His only stumble on the trail came after the Iowa caucuses, when his loss to Dole and Robertson became the focus for many doomsaying reports. His win in New Hampshire ended speculation that his campaign was virtually over, and his Shermanesque march through the South on Super Tuesday left him virtually assured of the nomination.

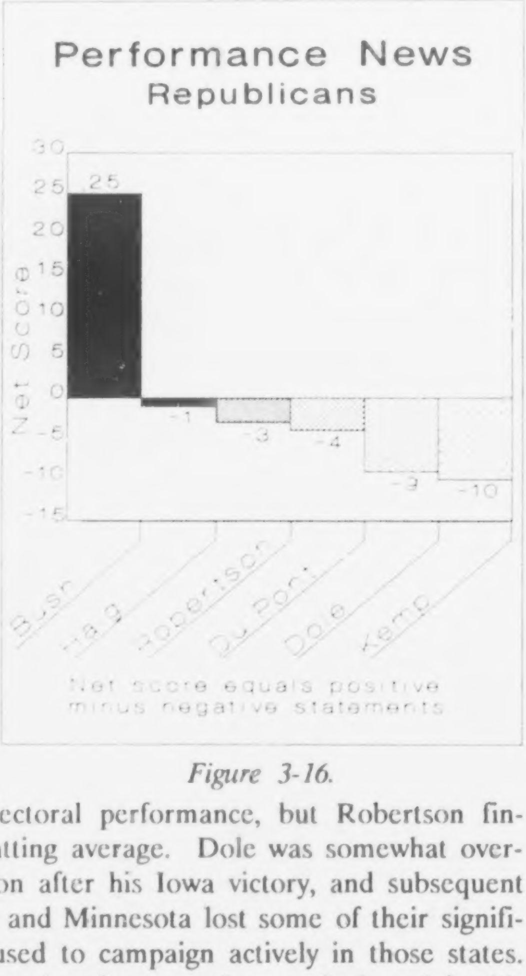


*Figure 3-16.*

The performance theme becomes more interesting with regard to the status of the runners-up. Dole and Robertson both attracted more negative than positive assessments of their electoral performance, but Robertson finished with a better batting average. Dole was somewhat overshadowed by Robertson after his Iowa victory, and subsequent wins in South Dakota and Minnesota lost some of their significance when Bush refused to campaign actively in those states. Dole's early wins were therefore greatly overshadowed by his poor performance on Super Tuesday.

Robertson benefited from winning a series of small early contests, such as an early Iowa straw poll and the Hawaii caucuses. The wins received considerable attention from a press corps that had yet to figure out what to make of the Robertson candidacy. After Hawaii, Robertson exulted that it was a "smashing victory" and later crowed, "I think a win of that magnitude is going to be of great significance in this campaign." The fact that he won only sixteen delegates did not dampen Robertson's mood. He knew--and skillfully used--the networks' propensity for front-loading. Repeated mentions of his early wins ensured that Robertson's performance scores were higher than Dole's for the campaign as a whole.

**Meeting Expectations.** Evaluations of a candidate's potential make up the bottom line in horse-race news. Information about organizational and financial factors, poll standings, and electoral performance are important mainly as guidelines for gauging each candidate's campaign potential. Especially in a race in which expectations were well established before any voting took place, concrete information about organizational strength, financial ability, and movement in the polls were necessary to alter preconceived expectations.

In the 1988 Republican nomination race, such prior expectations had largely been solidified as the race began. George Bush was seen from the beginning as the clear front-runner. Bob Dole was (in William Schneider's apt phrase) the "understudy," who would wait in the wings for front-runner Bush to stumble. Jack Kemp, a plausible challenger when campaign coverage began in 1987, was reduced to also-ran status before the primary season began. Pete du Pont and Alexander Haig were never given serious consideration as actual contenders. The only questions concerned the untested and unknown potential of Pat Robertson's candidacy.

Evaluations of candidate expectations during 1987 reflected this initial ranking of the players (see figure 3-17). Bush's casting in the lead role provided the usual mix of perquisites and perils. One out of every five horse-race statements about Bush during the preseason mentioned his front-runner status. Yet more negative predictions were made about his candidacy than about all his rivals combined. This reflected the conventional wisdom that Bush's candidacy would be hurt by a combination of factors, among them his weakness as a campaigner, the Iran-contra scandal, and a potential voter backlash against some of the Reagan administration's more unpopular policies. Two-thirds

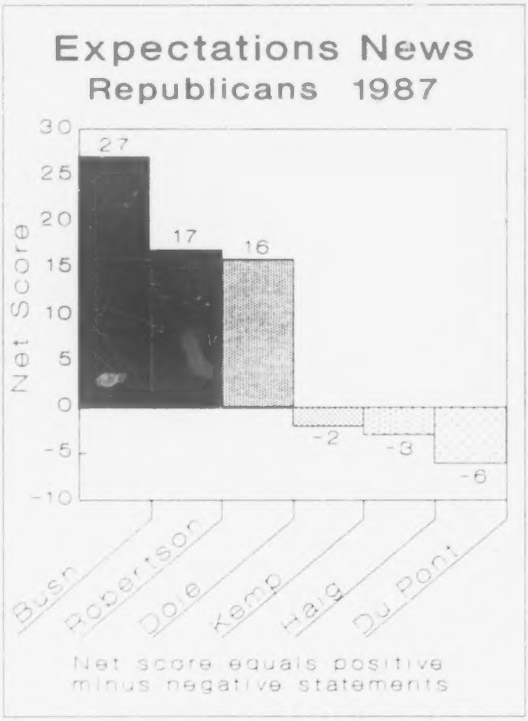


*Figure 3-17.*

of these negative predictions about Bush were provided by reporters, reflecting the large role they assume in handicapping the horse race.

As the second-ranked candidate, Dole was spared such negative evaluations. In the role of understudy, Dole needed to keep his candidacy strong enough to fill the vacuum that would result if Bush's electoral fortunes flagged. Thus, the negative predictions about Bush's future were good news for the Dole camp, and explicitly positive predictions about Dole outnumbered negative predictions by a four-to-one margin. Overall, evaluations of Dole's campaign potential at year's end were 83 percent positive.

Kemp, Haig, and du Pont were all written off before the end of 1987, because of their shortcomings in voter support, money, and organization. Robertson, however, could not be dismissed so easily. Much of the analysis of his campaign potential revolved around his financial and organizational bases, and the news there was uniformly positive. Robertson's weak performance at the polls was attributed to the purported inability of pollsters to track down his evangelical supporters. His electoral track record was a blank slate. The result was much uncertainty about Robertson's campaign potential, as reporters split between offering positive and mixed evaluations of his likely future performance. No reporter, however, voiced negative expectations about Robertson's future.

**At the Gate**. Moving into 1988, evaluations of the candidates' expectations continued in the same vein as the preseason. The weeks before the Iowa caucuses saw even more positive evaluations of Dole's future, as polls showed him the likely victor in Iowa. Three out of every four evaluations of Dole's future provided positive predictions about his likely performance.

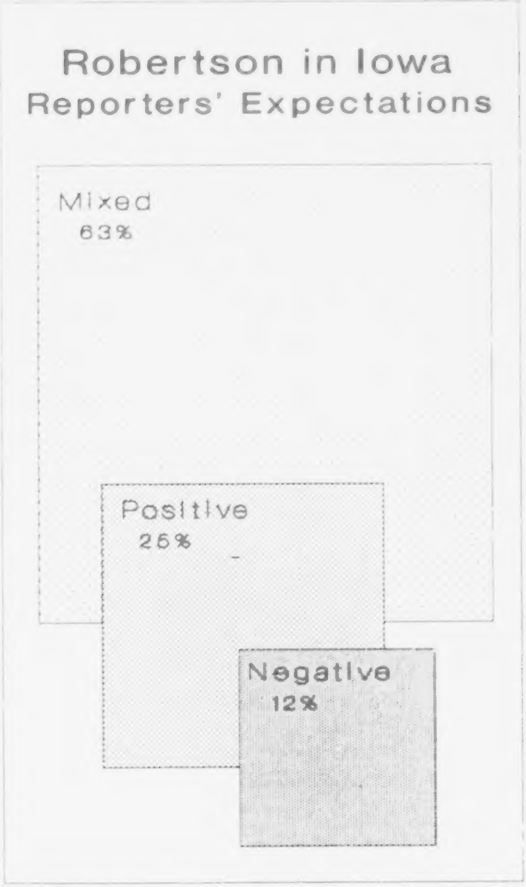


*Figure 3-18.*

Bush, in comparison, continued to receive a large number of negative predictions about his likely campaign performance. He was buoyed only somewhat by his victory in the disputed Michigan caucuses. Robertson continued to be a mystery, with repeated notices of the organizational and financial strength of his campaign and continued uncertainty about his ultimate performance. Nearly two out of three comments by reporters (63 percent) offered mixed evaluations of Robertson's campaign potential before Iowa (see figure 3-18).

The voting in Iowa seemed to confirm many of these predictions and evaluations. In the week after the caucuses, all sources who voiced an opinion agreed that Dole and Robertson had met or surpassed expectations of their candidacies, while three out of four sources said that Bush had failed to do so. This statistic is particularly noteworthy considering the large number of negative expectations Bush brought with him into Iowa. Just as surpassing expectations brings a media bonus, failing to meet already low expectations exacts a severe penalty. This accounts for the almost apocolyptic "now or never" judgments of Bush's campaign in New Hampshire.

Evaluative statements about the three major candidates' potential offered in the week before the New Hampshire primary reflected their standings in Iowa. Dole received the highest grade, with 83 percent positive evaluations. Robertson ran a reasonably strong second at 78 percent positive. Bush, who had previously been expected to win in New Hampshire, received positive evaluations only 44 percent of the time. If New Hampshire voters had listened to the network pundits and analysts the week before the primary, they would have concluded that the Bush campaign was a lost cause.

**Bush Battles Back**. Before the New Hampshire primary, expectations of Bush's performance were overwhelmingly low, despite his front-runner status. Of all explicitly positive and negative statements, 58 percent turned thumbs down on the vice president's future. (This figure includes the 1987 preseason.) His main rivals, in contrast, were enjoying exceptionally positive evaluations during the same period. Dole's horse-race predictions were a remarkable 84 percent positive during the year before the New Hampshire primary, and Robertson's were 76 percent positive.

With expectations of Bush's future so low, many were surprised by his convincing win in the New Hampshire primary. Whereas 66 percent of all sources before New Hampshire argued that Bush had failed to meet expectations, every source thereafter agreed that he had met or exceeded expectations. Ninety-five percent of all sources provided positive assessments of Bush's likely future performance in the three weeks after the New Hampshire primary. Suddenly the conventional wisdom had shifted, and the race became George Bush's to lose.

Network analysts quickly downshifted on Dole's campaign chances before Super Tuesday. If Dole's hopes lay only in a campaign stumble by Bush, the New Hampshire results convinced pundits that such a turn of events was unlikely. Whereas 93 percent of all predictions about Dole's candidacy were positive in the week before the New Hampshire primary, only 40 percent of his future performance ratings were positive in the weeks after New Hampshire.

Robertson was also given more negative assessments after New Hampshire, but he continued to receive large numbers of mixed evaluations before the Super Tuesday contests. Expectations of his future performance were split 50-50 in the wake of his last-place finish in New Hampshire, and two out of every three sources with an opinion argued that Robertson had failed to meet or surpass prior expectations.

The Bush bandwagon roared into high gear after Super Tuesday. Positive evaluations of his campaign potential outweighed negative ones by an eleven-to-one margin, while his rivals all received highly negative horse-race coverage.

Dole actually got the greatest amount of attention during the post-Super Tuesday period. But his coverage consisted largely of analyses of why he had lost. The answers often focused on the Dole campaign's organizational and financial failings. All sources with an opinion argued that Dole had failed to meet expectations, while nearly four out of five offered negative evaluations of Dole's likely future performance. The only sources who gave positive evaluations of Dole's horse-race potential after Super Tuesday were Dole and his own campaign staff.

Lingering uncertainty about the Robertson campaign dissolved quickly after the South Carolina primary and Super Tuesday. All sources agreed that Robertson had failed to meet expectations, and 91 percent of all evaluations of his campaign were negative. As with Dole, the only positive evaluations of his campaign chances came from his own camp. The Republican horse race was over.

## Winners and Losers

Television's contest coverage reflected the ups and downs of the fourteen candidates, but it was not a mirror image. There was always room for news judgment in reporting on campaign structures, poll standings, election results, and (especially) the expectations game that collectively constituted the horse race.

The 1988 race highlighted the importance the media assign to campaign structure as an early indicator of electoral potential. Organizational and financial strength underlay Robertson's image as a viable candidate despite his status as a political novice. The Bush and Dukakis campaigns enjoyed a steady stream of praise for organization and financial resources. Conversely, financial and organizational problems took the sheen off the efforts of Hart, Dole, and Simon.

Campaign '88 was also notable for its heavy reliance on polling news. With all three networks commissioning their own surveys, and tracking polls the order of the day, nearly one-third of all election stories mentioned poll results. One beneficiary was the Jackson campaign. Unlike his 1984 run, Jackson's 1988 candidacy was neither discounted nor disregarded. It helped that poll results (including exit polls) indicated both his domination of the black vote and a new ability to tap into white support. Thus a combination of positive polling news and better-than-expected electoral results kept evaluations of Jackson's prospects positive right up to the New York primary. This time around, both pundits and opponents took the Jackson candidacy more seriously.

Like Jackson, Robertson received positive early horse-race coverage, based on his expected support among evangelicals. His solid support base and excellent marks for organization produced the image of a strong challenger. But Jackson lived up to expectations on Super Tuesday, while Robertson's invisible army appeared in Bush's camp. Subjective indicators of strength were no substitute for votes on election day.

In retrospect these were all sideshows. The center ring was occupied by Michael Dukakis and George Bush. What were the similarities and differences in their horse-race profiles on the road to the nomination? The two winners both gained early and lasting recognition for the financial and organizational strengths of their campaigns. From February 1987 to June 1988, Bush suffered only one negative evaluation of his campaign structure; Dukakis had none. Both also fared well, for obvious reasons, in news about their performances in the polls and at the polls.

In the expectations race, the most subjective component of horse-race news, coverage of Bush and Dukakis diverged. Both men were often described as dull, but evaluations of Bush's potential were anything but monotonous. Handicappers who followed Bush's polling news downgraded his potential throughout 1987. He slipped further as the Iowa vote neared and went into a free fall during the week before the New Hampshire contest. Bush's victory there finally shifted his horse-race news from reverse into high gear for the Super Tuesday showdown. Bush's ups and downs seem even more dramatic in comparison with the smoother sailing enjoyed by Dukakis. His horse-race evaluations remained highly positive throughout the early primaries, never falling below the 90 percent mark.

The contrasting media profiles stem at least partly from the different paths that led to Atlanta and New Orleans. Dukakis managed to escape close scrutiny in both Iowa and New Hampshire. In both states the Massachusetts governor was expected to perform well enough to advance to the next round. Thus, the horse-race speculation centered on the future prospects of his opponents. Iowa was seen as a struggle between the two Midwestern candidates, Gephardt and Simon. In New Hampshire, Dukakis was ceded first place, while press attention focused on the outcome of the battle for second. The debate leading up to Super Tuesday was over the future of Gore and Gephardt, leaving Dukakis out of harm's way. Going into Illinois, handicappers weighed the fates of the two favorite sons, Simon and Jackson, again leaving Dukakis mainly on the sidelines. Thus, the wide field of contenders allowed Dukakis to come out of early contests with strongly positive horse-race evaluations and few negatives.

In contrast, Bush faced his most severe hurdles at the outset. Iowa and New Hampshire were both presented as major tests of his candidacy. Because of the more focused opposition, Bush faced more direct and decisive confrontations in the early rounds.

As the front-runner, Bush was given high marks early in the campaign. Yet this veneer of good press masked the fact that the more subjective components of his horse-race news were the most critical of his potential. After Bush's third-place finish in Iowa, predictions of his prospects veered sharply downward, pulling his horse-race score into the negative column. Only his New Hampshire comeback finally persuaded the pundits that he was not a paper tiger. With the loss of his front-runner status, the vice president took advantage of his only opportunity to do better than expected.

Dukakis's image as a strong candidate proved resilient because it was based mainly on such tangible indicators as organization, financial strength, and placement in the polls. Speculation about his expectations never formed a large part of his horse-race coverage until the Midwestern primaries, after he had overcome most of his rivals. Bush received more subjective coverage. Two-thirds of his horse-race coverage was based on assessments of his expectations. Bush was thus portrayed largely through the intuitive judgments of analysts and pundits, judgments that could (and did) shift dramatically when the objective situation changed.

Thus, the two eventual nominees followed somewhat different paths through the briar patch of prognostication and punditry.

Bush persisted in the face of early skepticism and premature reports of his imminent demise in New Hampshire. Dukakis traversed a longer but smoother path. For him, it was slow but steady wins the race.

## Notes

1. Quoted in Barbara Matusow, "Fear and Loathing '88," *Washingtonian*, April 1988, p. 116.
2. Ibid. p. 116.

# 4
# Rating the Players

*The press is largely an equal opportunity destroyer.*
--Barbara Matusow, *Washingtonian*

On Madison Avenue they claim it doesn't matter what people say about you, so long as they spell your name right. But don't try that line on the road to Pennsylvania Avenue. Gary Hart proved that bad press can be considerably worse than no press at all. But Hart was by no means the only candidate to complain about the tone of his coverage this year. At one time or another the campaigns of Simon, Gephardt, Jackson, Bush, Dole, and Robertson all went public with grievances about unfair treatment.

Disputes over media bias have become a regular and expected feature of presidential campaigns. In that sense, they are no longer news. Instead, they are often as formulaic and unedifying as children's shouting matches: "You did so!" "I did not!" The struggling or unsuccessful candidate typically blames his lot on a hostile or ignorant press corps. The journalists reply that they are just reporting the news, and the candidate's efforts would be better spent improving his message rather than blaming the messenger. Eventually both sides retire into their respective auras of righteous indignation.

It would really be news if a candidate admitted to getting better coverage than he deserved. Just as some paranoids really have enemies, however, some candidates really do get worse press than others. Questions of media fairness cannot be resolved without some standard of how each candidate *should* be treated. But we can determine how the candidates fared relative to one another. If fairness is ultimately in the eye of the beholder, these data can act as a lens that filters out nearsighted judgments.

## Good Press/Bad Press

We coded every assessment of each candidate's desirability as either positive, negative, mixed, or neutral. This included every aspect of his candidacy except horse-race judgments. So our good press/bad press variable asks whether a candidate would make a good president, but not whether he is likely to become president. Even after excluding mixed and neutral statements, the networks had broadcast over 1,800 assessments of the various candidates from February 1987 through June 1988.

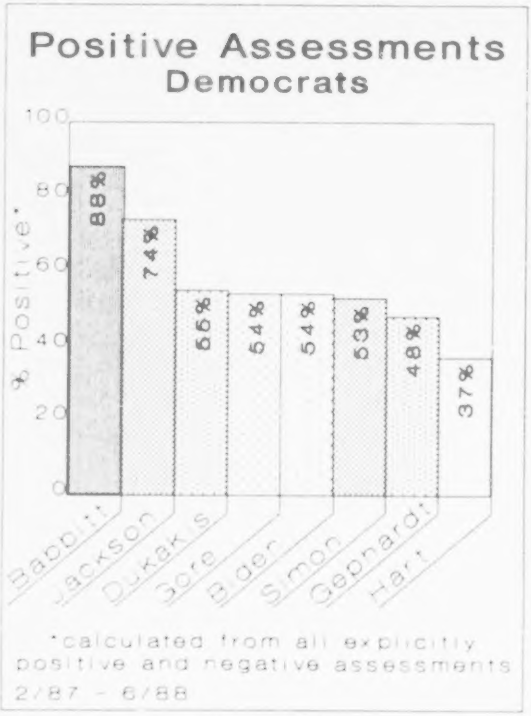
These judgments fell into five areas: (1) Character--the candidate's personality traits, ethics, and morals; (2) Job Performance--his record in past positions, whether in the public or the private sector. This category evaluates coverage of competence and ability rather than ethical conduct; (3) Issues--his positions on policy issues or general ideology; (4) Campaign Performance--his conduct during the campaign, such as whether he campaigned effectively, followed the right strategy and tactics, etc. Again, this category excludes questions of character. Gary Hart's behavior during the Donna Rice episode, for example, if assessed in terms of his sexual morals, was treated as a character issue. But Hart's handling of the episode in an effort to keep his campaign alive was also treated as part of his campaign performance; (5) General Assessments--included all other statements of support or opposition and general judgments of desirability.

We examined the messengers as well as the messages about the candidates. Source credibility is probably as important as any rationale in building support or opposition through media appeals. Research suggests that a crucial distinction in persuasive power is based on partisanship.[1] Because independent voices are more persuasive than committed partisans, we distinguished the opinions of clear partisans--the candidates, their families, and campaign staffs--from those of nonpartisans, including nonaligned party members, voters, pollsters and election analysts, other outside experts, interest groups, and journalists. Of course, many of these people are not completely nonpartisan. But their role is to convey a sense of the support and opposition toward each candidate that exists outside the circle of campaigners. In that sense, their judgments convey each candidate's success or failure in building support for his candidacy.

This distinction lets us look separately at the two very different election debates that play themselves out through the media--the give and take among the candidates and their staffs, which often consists of direct charges and countercharges, and the commentary by journalists, outside analysts, and ordinary voters. Their reactions provide a kind of Greek chorus that tells the audience how the battle is going and identifies the heroes and villains. Thus, the nonpartisan sources provide a critical context for judging the more clearly self-interested assessments of the combatants.

## The Democrats

If we accept the networks' assurance that they treat all candidates fairly, the coverage accorded several contenders might best be called fair to middling (see figure 4-1). Dukakis, Gore, Simon, and Biden all got slightly more good than bad press, with 53 to 55 percent positive ratings. The balance tipped slightly in the other direction for Gephardt, who finished at 48 percent positive. There were three exceptions to this "on the one hand. . .on the other hand" treatment. Gary Hart's dismal 37 percent positive rating comes as no surprise. His fairness issue was intertwined with the issue of his affairs. At the opposite pole were two unlikely candidates for fairest



*calculated from all explicitly positive and negative assessments 2/87 - 6/88

*Figure 4-1.*

of them all--the heretofore unsung Bruce Babbitt, and Jesse Jackson, whose complaints of unfair media treatment started during his 1984 run and continued right through the Iowa caucuses this year. Yet Jackson accumulated a 74 percent positive total, a three-to-one ratio of good to bad press that put him about twenty percentage points ahead of his major competitors. In fact, the rest of the Democratic field combined received slightly more bad press than good press.

Babbitt's TV treatment was even more favorable, if far less significant for the campaign. His eye-opening 88 percent positive rating was based on only one-sixth the number of assessments Jackson received. This fact alone serves notice that percentages can be deceiving when it comes to evaluating good and bad press. The volume of assessments and, even more, their timing can be critical. The changing rhythms of coverage over time are as important in sizing up the candidates as they are in calling the horse race.

**Hart Attack.** The preseason coverage during 1987 was largely a referendum on Gary Hart. Before the Donna Rice scandal, the networks paid about the same attention to the candidates that the general public did--very little. Through May 2 we coded only three assessments of front-runner Hart's desirability--two positive, one negative. During the next week we charted sixty-nine additional assessments, more than for any other Democrat during the entire calendar year (see figure 4-2). In view of this maelstrom, it may come as a shock that even 42 percent of those assessments were positive. But this total is misleading, since most of the favorable statements came from the candidate himself or members of his staff. Moreover, his opponents refrained from public criticism upon realizing that the Hart campaign needed no help in completing its self-destruction. That left the all-important nonpartisan sources (including journalists, outside analysts, and nonaligned Democrats), whose assessments were devastating--only 19 percent positive.

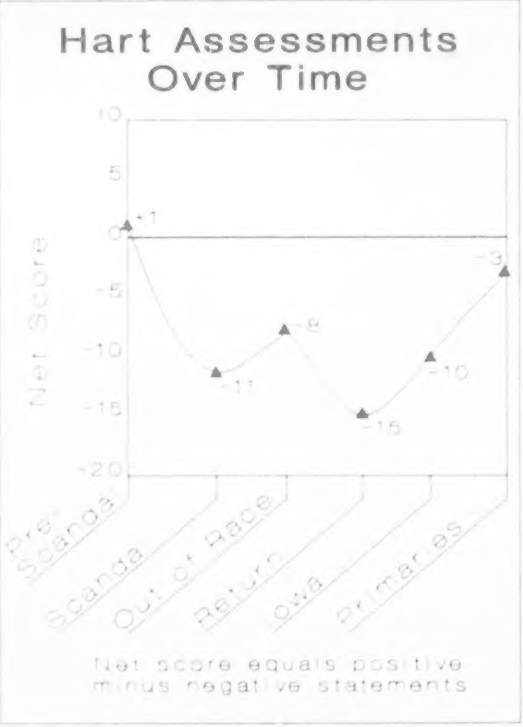


*Figure 4-2.*

It didn't get any better for Hart. Even after he withdrew, criticism continued to trickle into the election coverage, and the floodgate opened again after his reentry in December. Typical of the response was a blast delivered on ABC by former Democratic National Committee Chairman John White: "This makes Harold Stassen look like a statesman." NBC quoted another party official who concluded that Hart "needs a psychiatrist, because he ought not to be using a presidential race for political therapy." Further, the nonaligned voices were joined this time by his opponents, who complained bitterly about his attempted comeback.

After the Donna Rice episode, Hart's level of good press dropped to only 36 percent on May 10 and stayed there through year's end. He received nearly as many negative assessments on TV news in the last two weeks of 1987 after reentering the race as he had during those seven days in May. The negative momentum carried into the Iowa campaign. His level of good press held steady (at 34 percent), but by that point almost no one outside his own campaign had a good word for Hart. Supportive statements from nonaligned sources fell to a minuscule 10 percent. The Iowa electorate only confirmed the media's message.

The other character scandal of 1987 followed a different dynamic. In the wake of disclosures about his "borrowing" of rhetoric and law school plagiarism, Biden surmised that there are no second acts in American campaign scandals. By quickly admitting fault and withdrawing, he benefited from the wave of sympathetic coverage that normally attends the recently deceased. On ABC on September 17, 1987, Paul Simon called him "a person of basic integrity," while Michael Dukakis praised him on NBC as "a good guy. . .a fun guy [who] added a great deal to the campaign."

From start to finish of the plagiarism controversy, Biden's assessments ran 58 percent positive, including 46 percent among nonpartisan sources. In fact his coverage contained a man-bites-dog aspect--Biden himself was considerably more critical of his conduct (only 57 percent positive assessments) than were his opponents (83 percent positive). Considering that he never threatened to break out of single digits in the preference polls, it might be said that nothing in Biden's campaign became him like the leaving it (in view of the impetus for Biden's withdrawal, the borrowing of Shakespeare's words is hereby noted).

**Preseason Pleasantries.** Aside from the Hart and Biden scandals, 1987 was a holiday season of media good will toward all candidates (see figure 4-3). It was the preseason, before the winnowing starts with the contests that count, and there is something good to say about everyone. It may also have helped that there was no front-runner after Hart's departure, hence no lightning rod for criticism. Or the networks may have shied away from adversarial pieces after the Hart story provided a backlash of criticism against the media. In any case, the six Democrats whose campaigns were not marred by scandal enjoyed remarkably good press--over 80 percent positive.

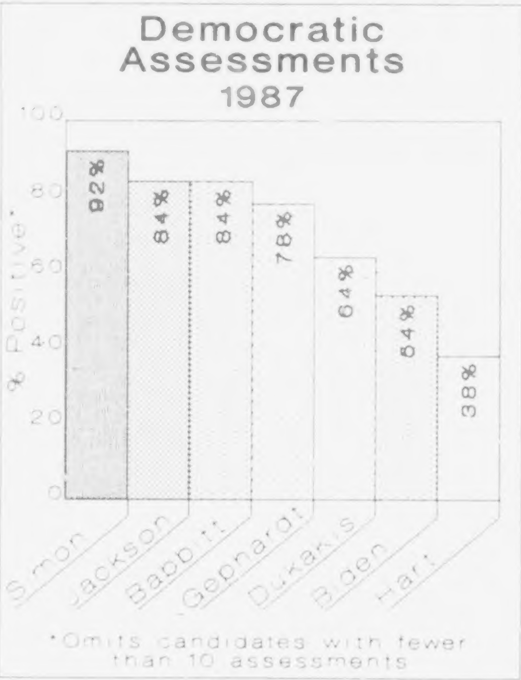


*Figure 4-3.*

Disparaging comments about the "seven dwarfs" referred to the inability of any one contender to break out of the pack as a new front-runner (not a surprising complaint before a primary election had focused public interest on any one candidate). Otherwise the candidates basked in the temporary warmth of what would inevitably prove a false spring for most--78 percent good press for Gephardt, 92 percent for Simon, 64 percent for Dukakis. Throughout all of 1987, Jackson, Dukakis, and Gore together received fewer negative assessments than Gary Hart did during his *absence* from the campaign trail between May and December.

**Media Malaise?** Then came the primary season, when media-borne criticism cuts through campaigns like the chill of New Hampshire winds in February. First Gephardt and Simon and then Dukakis saw their good press drop below the 50 percent level. Meanwhile Jackson and Gore struggled to be seen at all (see figure 4-4).

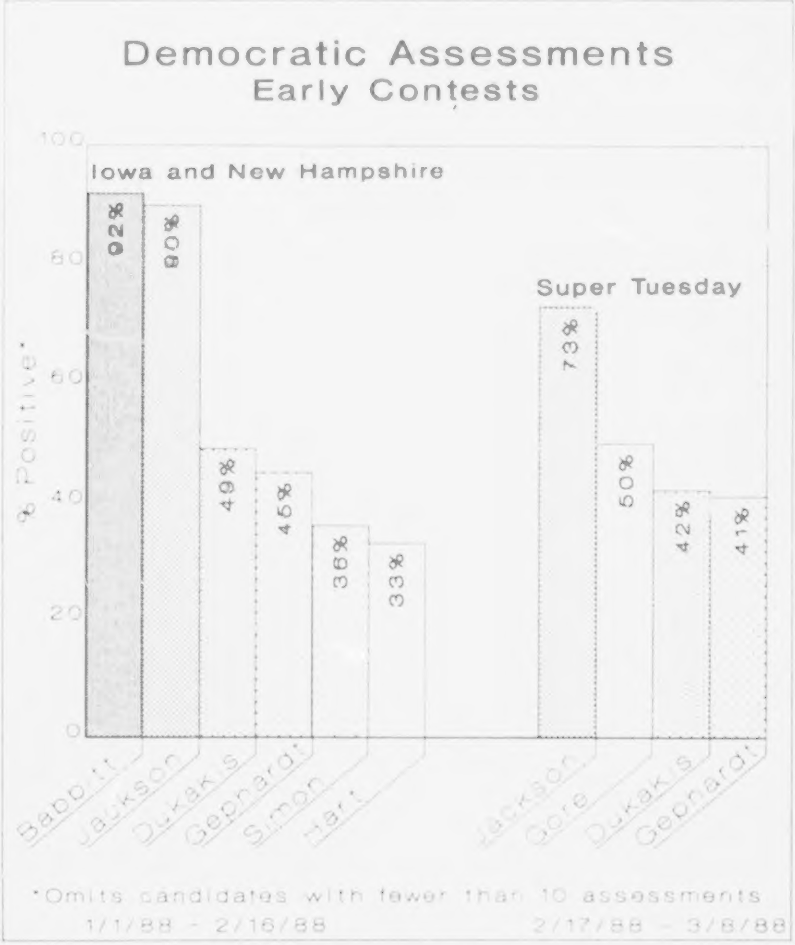


*Figure 4-4.*

Bruce Babbitt became a widely acknowledged media favorite virtually by default in January, following in the quixotic tradition of Morris Udall and John Anderson as contenders who impressed journalists for the same reason they failed to impress voters--disdain for political realities, willingness to endorse unpopular policies, and an air of ironic detachment from the probable consequences of their campaign strategies. While everyone else's level of good press was skidding in Iowa, Babbitt's improved from 34 percent to 91 percent (though his level of coverage remained low). It did not help, partly because he was being praised precisely for saying what voters did not want to hear. Positive TV coverage simply brought more voters within earshot of his unpopular call for higher taxes. After New Hampshire he was gone, reappearing briefly to tell John McLaughlin (with a bow toward Richard Nixon) that "the press won't have Bruce Babbitt to puff up anymore."

More surprising than Babbitt's treatment, perhaps, was the willingness of journalists to admit that they did play favorites under some circumstances. "Nightline" even ran a segment that focused on the Babbitt bubble and the question of media favoritism. The consensus was that the press can give a boost to sure losers without violating the rules of fairness, since it would not make any difference in the long run.

The other contenders did not fare as well. From January 1 through Super Tuesday on March 8, every remaining candidate aside from Jesse Jackson received more bad press than good press. Much of this downturn can be traced to campaign dynamics and strategies, which revolved around televised debates and negative television advertisements. Both formats provided plenty of "zingers"--one-liners or otherwise succinct put-downs--that created excellent sound bites (and, in the case of campaign ads, good visuals) for the evening news. A Gephardt ad, for example, twitted Mike Dukakis as an Eastern city-slicker for suggesting that Midwestern farmers grow "blueberries, flowers, and Belgian endive." Dukakis retaliated with an ad that criticized Gephardt's changes of position by showing a Gephardt look-alike somersaulting across the screen in a series of flip-flops. Both segments migrated from their paid media origins onto the free media as news items.

The criticism came from reporters as well as opponents. On March 4, for example, ABC's Joe Bergantino called Dukakis "vulnerable to criticism of his foreign policy as book-learning with a strictly liberal bent." And on March 23, NBC's Bob Kur found a downside to Bill Bradley's endorsement of Dukakis. He reminded the audience that the Massachusetts governor needed the endorsement because he was considered bland and reminded voters of Jimmy Carter. Kur then interviewed the Massachusetts House Speaker, who characterized Dukakis as stubborn and arrogant.

In a season of belt-tightening at the networks, the unprecedented onslaught of public debates provided plenty of film footage for cheap and easy illustrations of campaign conflicts. Since television conveys conflict better than explanation, the candidates quickly learned to deliver the kind of pithy putdowns most likely to generate replays the following evening. It was a classic case of each individual acting in his own interest to the detriment of all, as TV debate coverage began to resemble a Don Rickles routine.

The comic side of this orchestrated scramble to skewer one another did not escape the participants. After one exchange in which Gephardt charged that Simon "oughta take off his bow tie, because he's just another politician," Dukakis mockingly offered to play moderator: "Paul and Dick, are you guys getting along? Anything I can do to help?" Both lines made the network newscasts, as their authors doubtless intended. But it was no laughing matter for them that Gephardt's level of good press sank to 40 percent during New Hampshire and Simon's dropped even lower. Simon's record of only 31 percent good press in Iowa was even worse than Gary Hart's 34 percent. When you're that far down, the only direction left is out. Meanwhile Dukakis and Gore remained mired in the media doldrums, struggling to stay in the 40 to 50 percent range.

**Jackson's Action**. Wasn't there any good news for Democrats after Iowa? Indeed there was, but most of it benefited one candidate. While his opponents fizzled on TV, Jesse Jackson sizzled. We have already noted the sharp rise in his coverage after New Hampshire. Jackson was getting great press as well as a greater share of it. Unlike his rivals, Jackson's budding preseason blossomed into a glorious summer. His combined 90 percent level of good press before the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary was somewhat misleading, since his level of coverage was still low. But once he stepped onto center stage, the rave reviews continued.

The same media spotlight that wilted his competitors cast a flattering glow on Jackson, as his level of good press attests--73 percent during the Super Tuesday campaigning, and 79 percent during the following month of mostly Midwestern contests, including an unbeatable 100 percent in the Illinois and Michigan primaries (see figure 4-5). During the seven weeks after his New Hampshire "takeoff," Jackson's level of good press was over twenty-five percentage points higher than the rest of the Democratic field, even as his horse-race assessments soared along with his share of the coverage. No other candidate in 1988 simultaneously attained such high marks for visibility, viability, and desirability. It is the media equivalent of a triple play--as difficult, rare, and dramatic in politics as in baseball.

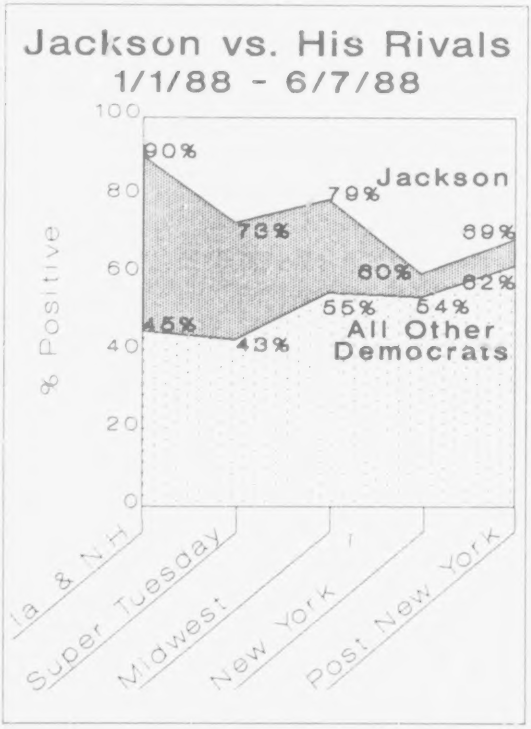


*Figure 4-5.*

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the coverage was its inspirational quality, which sometimes resembled a campaign commercial more than a news report. On the day of the Illinois primary, CBS's Bruce Morton stressed the intense emotion generated by Jackson as he followed the candidate through tours of a housing project and an urban college campus. "In Chicago," he began, "[Jackson] brought tears and excitement wherever he went." The camera showed Jackson walking among well-wishers, working the crowd, extending hugs and waves, leading cheers. The voice-over continued, "They gave him what they had. They gave him love. This week Jackson has been king. Treated like a rock star in a campaign more emotional than any, perhaps, since Robert Kennedy's in 1968." Amid encomiums from supporters ("He got my blood pumping with his excitement."), the college students sang "Just reach out and touch somebody's hand. . . " as Jackson did just that. Morton's final comment put into words what the camera had just told us: "He's neon and fireworks. All the rest this week have been pastel."

Despite this dramatic media boost, some Jackson supporters (though not the candidate himself) continued to complain about press bias. In the March 21 issue of *New Republic*, Barbara Ehrenreich asserted, "No candidate has been so rudely handled by the press." Ten days later *Washington Post* columnist Dorothy Gilliam accused "pundits and reporters" of using "condescending language delivered in patronizing tones. . . showing arrogance and presumptuousness." She concluded, "If the media turned a fair and balanced eye on Jackson, instead of viewing him as a crackpot or bogeyman, they could find the real person. . . . But first, the media must lie on their own couch and face the veiled demons of racism and white supremacy."

Such complaints from the Jackson camp are hardly new. But both these columns were written at the height of Jackson's media boomlet, in the wake of his Super Tuesday and Michigan triumphs. The explanation may have less to do with cognitive dissonance than a preemptive strike.

Even as the current wave of acclaim was breaking across the nation's airwaves, the next wave was already forming in Washington newsrooms. Newspaper and magazine articles began to debate charges of a pro-Jackson bias or "free ride." *New Republic* writer Fred Barnes criticized Jackson's campaign rhetoric, columnist Ben Wattenberg attacked his foreign policy, and the *Washington Post* ran a series of unflattering articles probing his stand on issues and record as a civil rights activist. Perhaps the sharpest words came from Charles Krauthammer. In his April 1 *Washington Post* column, he called Jackson an extremist, compared his populism to Mussolini's, and challenged the media to "subject [Jackson] to the same kind of scrutiny on issues and ideology to which they subject white candidates."

It is commonplace for campaign partisans to complain about both their man's negative media treatment and his opponents' overly positive treatment. But we don't recall another controversy in which the media were simultaneously charged with being too soft and too hard on the same candidate. Disputes about media bias are especially acrimonious during campaigns because political futures are at stake. What gave a special edge to this controversy was the addition of the most volatile issue in American politics today--the treatment accorded racial minorities. Jackson personified the "fairness issue" for both sides. His supporters were quick to see media criticism as at least implicitly racist, while his detractors treated media praise as evidence of affirmative action coverage.

**Race and Politics.** Do racial concerns help explain Jackson's media profile? The answer is a qualified yes. The crucial qualification is that race functioned mainly as a background factor rather than an independent force in shaping the coverage. It dictated campaign strategies in a way that inevitably influenced story selection and source comments. Unlike 1984, this year Jackson had no serious competitor for the black vote. So a white opponent who attacked him was more likely to alienate his black constituency than to make inroads into it. Jackson's limited appeal among whites was never so significant as to seriously threaten anyone else's support base. The result was a two-stage campaign in which the white candidates attacked only each other in the expectation that the survivor could ward off any eventual threat from Jackson.

Thus Jackson was the exception partly because his campaign was exceptional. By eschewing confrontations with his opponents, he avoided the debate zingers and attack-ad snippets that got replayed on the evening news, dragging everybody into the mud before a national audience. In addition to avoiding this downside coverage, Jackson benefited from an inspirational and motivational side of his campaign that was unavailable to white candidates. Reporters were understandably moved upon seeing the message of hope and self-improvement that the candidate brought to the urban black ghettos. Jackson's exhortation to "be somebody" presented him as a role model who had been where they were and could show them the way out. It was a role he had perfected over the years as the head of PUSH. It allowed him to meld a political campaign with a social movement that transcended partisan politics.

CBS reporter Judy Muller described her response to one of these rallies on the April 26 radio broadcast of "Correspondent's Notebook":

> When Geraldine Ferraro became the Democratic candidate for vice president, I stood on the convention floor and fought back tears. Forget objectivity; the moment transcended politics. As I followed the Jesse Jackson campaign in Philadelphia yesterday, I fell on the same phenomenon: a transcendent pride in this person's breakthrough. You could see it on the faces of people on Locust Street. . .you could hear it in the voice of the gospel singer at a Jackson rally.

Thus race influenced the media coverage insofar as Jackson was presented as a representative and role model for black America rather than a political candidate who happened to have a black constituency (like Mondale in 1984), and also insofar as this facet of his campaign affected the strategies

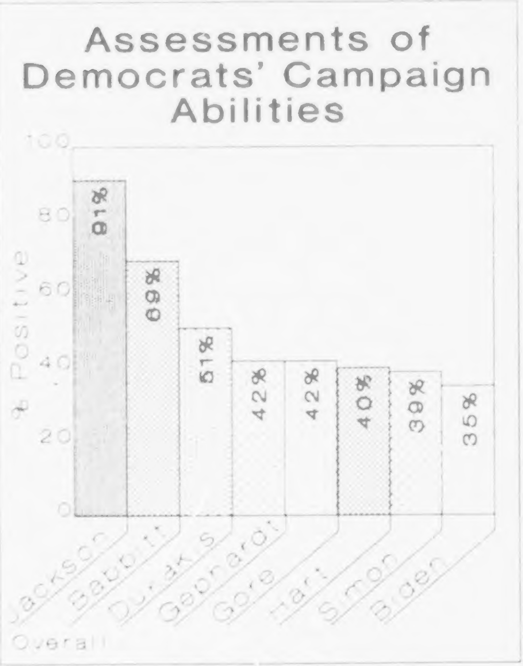


*Figure 4-6.*

and responses of his white opponents. This is reflected in the element of his candidacy that attracted the most positive assessments of all--his performance as a campaigner. Assessments of Jackson's campaign performance were a stunning 91 percent positive, nearly double the level of good press attained by any other major candidate. Compare the near-universal praise for Jackson's campaign skills with the meager ratings of 51 percent achieved by Dukakis, 42 percent by Gore, 39 percent by Simon, and 42 percent by Gephardt (see figure 4-6). The "transcendent pride" that radiated from his audiences to reporters like Judy Muller left no room for the usual sniping about strategy and tactics.

Although his race at first prevented Jackson from being viewed as a serious candidate, the "race question" helped his media coverage after New Hampshire.[2] But once his horse-race perceptions changed, this same factor gave his campaign a transpolitical dimension and even a historic significance that endowed his coverage with a positive cast unavailable to his opponents.

These factors help explain why Jackson received the most positive coverage of any major candidate from partisan and nonpartisan sources alike. His 72 percent positive rating from partisan sources attests to the unwillingness of opponents to criticize him. His even higher positive rating of 75 percent among nonpartisan sources (including 91 percent among reporters) reflects a campaign style and response that genuinely evoked the overused concept of charismatic leadership.

All this is also testimony to Jackson's campaign skills in milking his appearances and photo opportunities for maximum political impact, while avoiding the "Hymietown" and Farrakhan-style controversies that brought charges of anti-Semitism and reverse racism in 1984. But it is still necessary to address an aspect of the "free ride" charge that was usually raised only implicitly or indirectly--the intimidation factor. Just as racism may have skewed early reports of Jackson's prospects, so may fear of being branded a racist once the bandwagon began. The effect of either factor is easy to posit, difficult to document, and probably impossible to measure.

We have seen how Jackson's good press coverage can be accounted for by less direct and nefarious factors, some of which have a racial component. Nonetheless, the charge of racism is as damning today as the charge of Communist sympathies was for an earlier generation. Moreover, this stick may be accompanied by the psychological carrot of assisting a candidacy whose value transcends the candidate himself. If Jackie Robinson goes two for four, why play up his two strikeouts? This is something reporters talked about, but rarely for public consumption. A *Washington Post* story on April 5 quoted a network correspondent who asked for anonymity:

> I know I'm not a racist, but I also know that it would be very easy to do and say things now vis-a-vis Jesse that could easily be interpreted as racism. I'm willing to do tough pieces on Jesse, but you can be sure that we'll look at every damn syllable. It's absolutely clear to me that if Jesse were a white man, he'd probably be getting . . . kicked around rather royally by the press.

Few topics are so sensitive as to force journalists off the record, but racism is that kind of issue. And it is precisely its sub rosa quality that makes its impact difficult to measure. The closest we can come is to follow the dynamic of Jackson's assessments over time and see if his rise and fall in good press deviated from that of previous media favorites.

**Looking for Big Mo'.** Media bubbles in recent elections have been of two types. Either they waft gently off stage with a foredoomed candidate or they blow up in the face of a one-time darkhorse the moment his candidacy is deemed "serious." The first model fits Bruce Babbitt, Morris Udall before him, and, up until the New Hampshire primary, Jesse Jackson. These men all got good press partly because reporters liked them or valued their candidacies, and partly because it was safe to say nice things about them, since they weren't going anywhere. The latter is more problematic. It is the media momentum that election analysts complain about, the big mo' that politicians pray for. Only the chosen few find it, and no one keeps it long. But everyone hopes for that momentary boost that can turn an also-ran into a better-than-expected, or a contender into a champion.

Jimmy Carter put media momentum as well as Iowa on the map in 1976. By the late primaries, however, he was already being subjected to the press ridicule that would dog his presidency. In 1980 John Anderson ran a media campaign that won more converts on the campaign bus and the pages of "Doonesbury" than in the Republican party. But when he insisted on running as an independent in the general election, instead of settling for some amorphous moral victory, he suddenly became just another politician. Michael Robinson and Margaret Sheehan's content analysis of the 1980 campaign found that Anderson got the best press of any candidate through the primary season, but the worst press thereafter.[3]

Gary Hart was Mr. Momentum of 1984. He parlayed a better-than-expected second-place finish in Iowa into a media bonanza that carried him to victory in New Hampshire and to the verge of a Super Tuesday sweep. Then, as William C. Adams has shown, his TV coverage suddenly soured, as the networks questioned everything about the candidate from his name to his signature.[4] Thereupon late deciders broke mainly for Mondale, keeping the race alive.

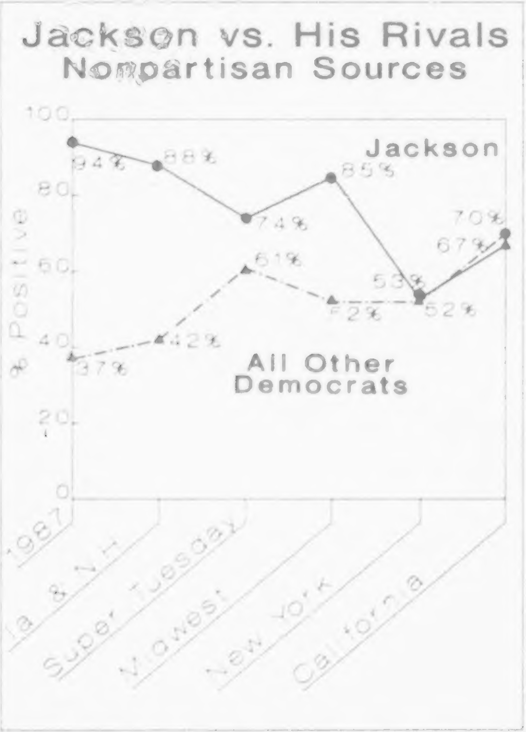


*Figure 4-7.*

If these examples suggest that candidates who live by the media die by the media, then the New York primary was Jesse Jackson's O.K. Corral. His proportion of bad press, running at only 21 percent after Super Tuesday, nearly doubled to 40 percent during the New York campaign. These more negative assessments partly reflected his opponents' new willingness to attack him. But his good press dropped off among nonpartisan sources as well, especially Jewish voters and activists (see figure 4-7). From Super Tuesday through the Wisconsin primary, his nonpartisan assessments ran 85 percent positive. In New York that figure dropped to 53 percent.

Typical of the heightened criticism was an NBC story on April 17 in which Tom Pettit interviewed Jews in the Brighton Beach section of Brooklyn. In an eighth-grade class, an articulate schoolboy waved all the red flags: "When a Jew walks into a voting booth and sees Jesse Jackson's name on it, and he remembers [him] embracing Louis Farrakhan, who called Hitler a great man and Judaism a gutter religion, it goes through his mind--Why should we want to vote for this man?" An elderly nursing home resident was more succinct, if no more forgiving, in her comment on Jackson's support for Yasser Arafat and the PLO: "Israel has too many enemies and Mr. Jackson has too many friends."

Yet this increase in criticism was mild compared with the pasting Hart took on the eve of Super Tuesday in 1984. Although Jackson's proportion of bad press doubled, that still gave him a 60 percent level of good press during the New York race, slightly ahead of Dukakis (53 percent) and Gore (55 percent). Until New York he was in a league by himself. Now he was just a step ahead of the field. One reason was Dukakis's refusal to criticize him. Another was the continuation of "inspirational" stories about Jackson's impact on nonwhites that counterbalanced the alarms raised by Jewish residents.

For example, an NBC story on April 13 on "how much Jackson means to the people for whom he speaks" struck many of the same chords as Bruce Morton's piece from Chicago a month earlier. Correspondent Bob Kur commented, "Watching the candidate even after a debate in this city is like watching a rock star after a concert." Manhattan borough president David Dinkins told viewers, "Little ones look at their parents and grandparents and see no way out. And Jesse stands tall and says 'I understand'." This endorsement was followed by interviews with black schoolchildren after a Jackson speech. (Sample: "Jesse, he grabbed my heart.") Kur concluded that Jackson's campaign was one of "hope and pride."

Thus, Jesse Jackson's media honeymoon may have ended in New York, but neither partner demanded an annulment. Once his candidacy was cloaked in the mantle of "seriousness," Jackson's coverage inevitably toughened. But the same factors that fueled his rise also cushioned his fall--his own upbeat above-the-battle campaign style, his chief rival's unwillingness to criticize him, the inspirational dimension of his campaign that transcended partisan calculations, and (perhaps) the reluctance of journalists to undermine a campaign of historic significance. All this couldn't prevent Jackson's bubble from eventually coming down to earth, but it produced a gentle landing.

## The Republicans

Assessments of the Republicans were more predictable for one overriding reason--the presence of a clear front-runner. Attacking top dogs and building up underdogs is practically an organizing principle of political journalism. So it came as no surprise that George Bush got worse press than his main challenger Robert Dole. By maintaining his status throughout and wrapping up the nomination early, Bush at least avoided some of the rollercoaster coverage that the Democrats suffered.

If the race lacked the thrills and spills of the Democratic carnival, it did have its moments--notably Dole's window of opportunity after Iowa and Robertson's erratic performance after New Hampshire. Both were quick to blame the media for some of their problems. With the addition of Bush's run-in with Dan Rather, media controversies swirled around all three major candidates. Not bad for a race that was over by Super Tuesday.

**Bush Bashing.** As the front-runner and designated target, Bush had cause for complaint throughout most of the campaign. Ironically, he also had cause to thank the media for giving him a boost when he needed it most.

Overall, Bush attracted both attention and criticism throughout the campaign (see figure 4-8). His 379 assessments on the evening news shows were more than Dole's and Robertson's combined total (and about half again as many as either Dukakis or Jackson received). All this attention proved a mixed blessing for Bush right from the start. During the preprimary honeymoon period, he was the only major candidate aside from the hapless Hart to attract more blame than praise.

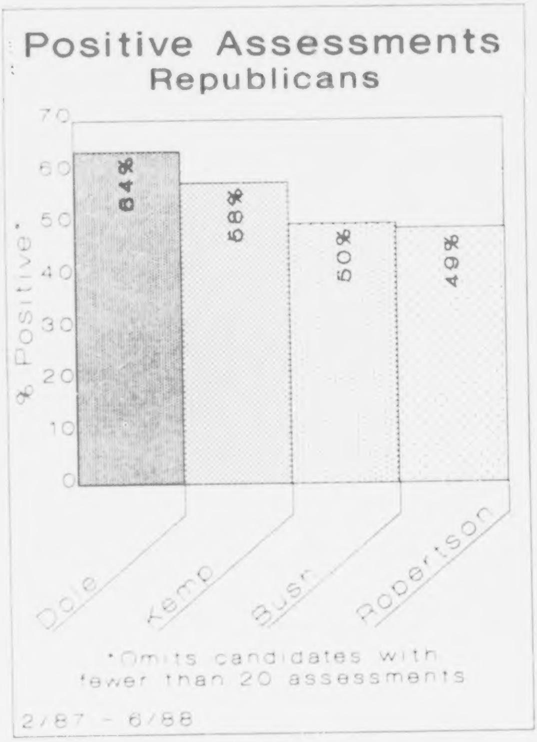


*Figure 4-8.*

In an October 12 ABC profile, for example, Carole Simpson noted that Bush was being "pictured as an invisible man, trying desperately hard to gain attention." She cited a recent poll that a majority of the public considered him "a wimp." And in closing she suggested the lack of esteem in which many journalists hold Bush: "Campaign aides say people will soon see a new, more exciting George Bush. Many reporters are anxious to see that."

The vice president's 48 percent positive rating during 1987 sank even further after January 1988, falling to a low of 41 percent during the six-week Iowa campaign. That coverage included the now famous Dan Rather interview on January 25. After their acerbic exchange over Bush's role in the Iran-contra affair, his good press took a nosedive on CBS. From January 1 until the interview, CBS provided the most positive coverage of Bush. For the remainder of the Iowa campaign, Bush's stock dropped from 55 percent to only 27 percent positive on CBS, while remaining virtually unchanged at the other two networks (see figure 4-9).

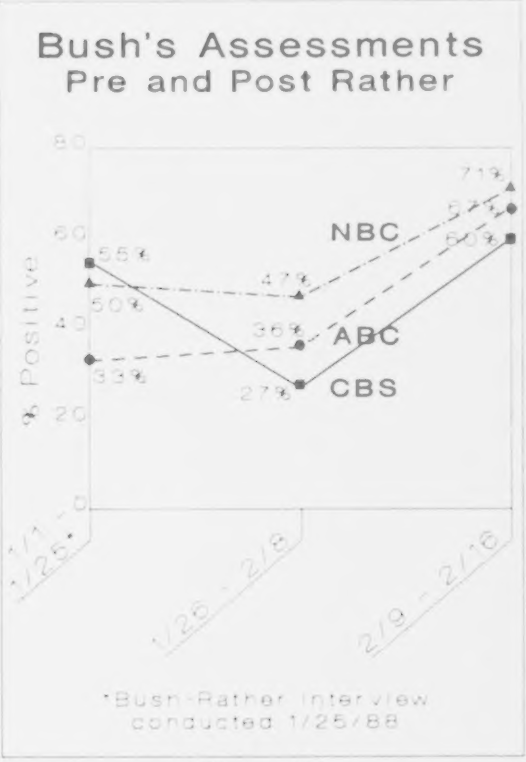


*Figure 4-9.*

During the twelve months before the Iowa caucuses, Bush's level of good press stood nearly twenty percentage points behind the rest of the Republican field (45 percent vs. 63 percent). Then a funny thing happened. As the Bush campaign staggered into New Hampshire amid dire predictions of imminent destruction, reports on the candidate suddenly became more positive. As his viability rating sank, his desirability score soared to 67 percent positive. For the first and only time during the entire campaign, assessments of Bush were on a par with those of his principal rivals (see figure 4-10).

The shift was partly due to a change in the issues raised, as the candidates adapted to a more pro-Reagan electorate. The disappearance of discussion about the Iran-contra affair, for example, obviously helped Bush's image. And some of the attacks shifted to Robertson, who was treated as a more serious contender. But this change also reflects that well-established pattern of campaign news: attack the front-runner but let up on the underdog. Thus, Bush's surge among nonpartisan sources was even more dramatic than his total--from only 28 percent positive in Iowa to 79 percent in New Hampshire.

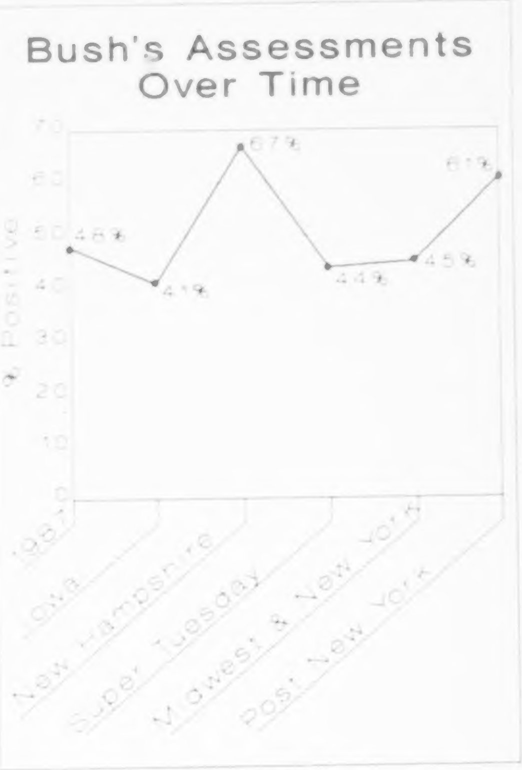


*Figure 4-10.*

Reporters may have scoffed privately at the spectacle of the vice president taking an eighteen-wheeler for a spin at a New Hampshire truck stop, but this picture opportunity, combined with positive comments from local truckers, didn't hurt the "regular guy" image he was cultivating. And reporters didn't always scoff. Two days before the February 16 vote, NBC's Tom Pettit summarized Bush's career in terms that reinforced his claim as heir to the Reagan legacy: "Since he became Ronald Reagan's number two in 1980, he's been training for the top job. He did everything he was asked, went everywhere he was asked, a million miles on Air Force Two, hardly missing a country or a county fair. His resume is a yard long, from Navy combat pilot to baseball captain at Yale, successful oil man, congressman, et cetera." Later in the story Pettit talked to Garrick Utley about Bush's character: "Garrick, I've covered Bush in many states and in many countries and, in case you were wondering, he is not a quitter. He is a very determined man and quitting is simply not in his character."

Thus, for one brief but possibly crucial moment, George Bush lost his status as media whipping boy. Viewers were exposed to stories about his loyalty, steadfastness, and experience, rather than his wimpiness, evasiveness, and involvement in the Iran-contra mess. In conjunction with his negative horse-race news, the overall portrait of a good man in desperate straits might have been just the right image to shore up Bush's supporters and get them out to the polls.

The novelty of Bush's week of positive coverage is driven home by what happened next. The moment his New Hampshire win reestablished his front-runner status, Bush's coverage returned to its former doldrums. As the campaign trail wound through the South and Midwest, the networks rediscovered the candidate's flaws as quickly as they had forgotten them in New England. On March 7, for example, ABC's Carole Simpson noted that Bush had been called a preppy elitist, a lap dog, and a wimp. Then she interviewed political analyst Kevin Phillips, who called him "an overstuffed resume." It is hard to believe that one man's balance of virtues or vices could undergo such mercurial changes. What had changed much more clearly was the likelihood of his nomination.

Bad press is nothing new for George Bush. In the 1984 campaign Michael Robinson and his colleagues examined TV news coverage of all four candidates in the general election. They computed positive and negative "spin" toward each candidate to produce an overall "spin ratio." They concluded, "George Bush had a spin ratio that defied computation--1,500 seconds of 'bad press' pieces and zero seconds of good press."[5]

So it would have surprised no one to hear Bush assail the press for "trivial" treatment of his campaign, a "double standard" of negative coverage, and a daily diet of "preconceived notions, prewritten stories, and premeditated cliches." What did surprise everyone was the actual source of these complaints--Bob Dole.

**Dole's Doldrums**. After taking a lot of heat for his performance as a vice-presidential candidate in 1976, Dole was an unexpected media favorite in 1988. His record of 64 percent good press left his main rivals in the dust. Reporters celebrated his wit, his legislative leadership, and his maturation since the 1976 debacle (in which he referred to World Wars I and II as "Democrat wars"). The praise came from partisan and nonpartisan sources alike. ABC's Brit Hume called him a "master legislator," Alexander Haig pronounced him "head and shoulders above George Bush" in leadership and toughness, and Dan Rather gave Elizabeth Dole time to talk about his "tremendous qualifications."

So journalists were less angered than astonished by his unexpected exercise in media bashing. As columnist Mary McGrory responded in an open letter, "If the press had been your only problem, you'd be the nominee. . . . Who told the world about your appeal to Democrats? Who wrote your victory in Iowa into the ground? Who predicted you'd knock them dead in New Hampshire? Who said you were the only Republican who could win black votes?" In an aside, McGrory also revealed her feelings about Bush's coverage: "We thought if anybody was going to take a crack at us, it would be George Bush. Have you read his press notices? . . . You must have noticed that reporters, who often laugh *with* you, tend to laugh *at* him."[6] [her emphasis] In fact, Dole received more good press than Bush during every phase of the campaign (except for New Hampshire, which was a virtual dead heat) and in every dimension of coverage--character, job performance, issue stance, and performance as a candidate.

What probably grated on Dole was the return of the "mean Bob Dole" image after his bitter demand, upon losing the New Hampshire primary, that Bush stop lying about his record. All three networks replayed that film clip on their evening news shows, and the airwaves were suddenly filled with reminders of Dole's reputation as a political "hatchet man."

Although Dole's proportion of good press dropped only ten percentage points after New Hampshire, the tenor of the criticism must have stung. A John Chancellor commentary referred to his "nasty crack" as "a stunning example of Bob Dole's greatest weakness--that he has a mean streak. It reminded everyone of the old Bob Dole. . .the Dole of the icy and cutting sarcasm." Chancellor noted that "presidents are supposed to be nice guys even when they aren't," and asked how "'President' Dole might react if Gorbachev lied about the Dole record."

Harry Truman might have been surprised to hear about the perceived importance of niceness as a presidential quality. And a nasty crack about a Soviet leader might play very nicely with the electorate (unless Chancellor was suggesting that Dole might press the nuclear button in a fit of pique). But the most telling aspect of this commentary was the assertion that "everyone" was reminded of the mean old Bob Dole. The reference best suited the press corps, who had mentally filed away this story to await the moment of its reemergence.

During the Iowa campaigning, a reporter unexpectedly asked Bush what he thought about "the mean Bob Dole." A perplexed Bush did a double take and stumbled over the response. It was a poignant moment because it was so clearly unscripted. Bush obviously didn't have the faintest idea what "the mean Bob Dole" referred to. It was part of the media's repertory of stereotypes, not the candidates'.

**Robertson's Fall from Grace**. The prickliest media relations in the entire field probably belonged to the Robertson campaign. They viewed the media, especially the national media, as a hostile and potentially dangerous force. Shortly before he announced his candidacy, Robertson told a group of his employees, "Somebody says they wrap fish in yesterday's newspapers. But, thank the Lord, most of the Christians neither read the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. If they do read them they don't believe them, thank goodness."[7]

It didn't help relations when reporters discovered that Robertson's wife was pregnant before they were married. The angry candidate fired back, "It is outrageous to intrude into a man's family, and to do damage to a man's wife and children, under the guise of journalism." Such periodic flare-ups over the candidate's personal and professional development culminated in Robertson's charge of bigotry against Tom Brokaw for calling him a "former television evangelist." (Robertson preferred the more neutral tag, "religious broadcaster.")

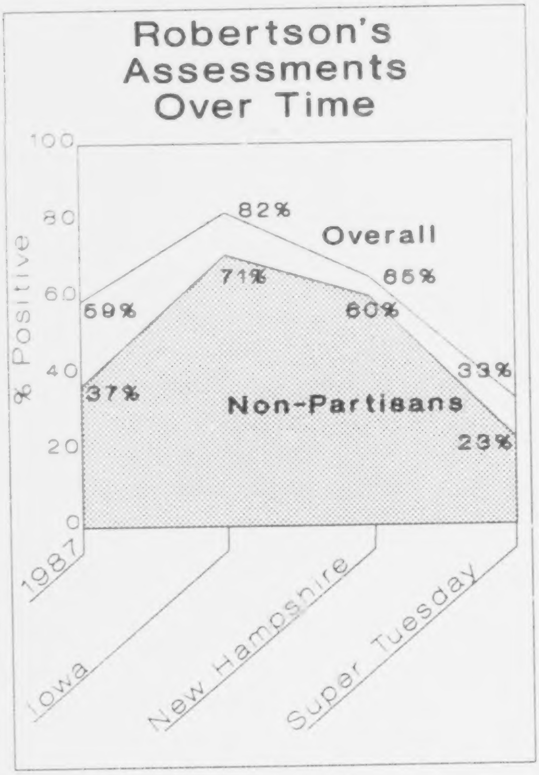


*Figure 4-11.*

At first, assessments of Robertson seemed to belie the ill feelings. Until the New Hampshire primary, in fact, he received the best press of any major contender besides Jesse Jackson. After February 16, however, the coverage shifted into reverse. Thereafter Robertson got the worst press of any candidate still in the running--only 30 percent positive. His total of 49 percent positive approximately equals that of Bush, just as the height of the mountains and the depths of the oceans average out to sea level. The most salient aspect of Robertson's coverage is precisely the rollercoaster course it took (see figure 4-11).

The reason for this sudden shift may seem obvious. Robertson's Iowa surprise ensured that the media would be watching when the candidate began putting his foot in his mouth. Robertson was hurt badly by controversies over his "funny facts" on topics as diverse as Soviet missiles in Cuba, hostages in Beirut, and political motives behind the Jimmy Swaggart scandal. His aborted libel suit against former congressman Pete McCloskey did not help either. Did Robertson's coverage nosedive because his campaign self-destructed? It was not quite that simple.

Robertson's coverage, like Jackson's, benefited from his opponents' early disinclination to attack him. Through New Hampshire he compiled a remarkable 88 percent positive profile from partisan sources. But that did not mean the other contenders were praising Robertson, just that they ignored him. Most of the positive assessments came from within the Robertson camp. Unlike Jackson, however, Robertson's positive profile was undercut by criticism from nonpartisan sources. During every phase of the campaign he received lower marks from independent sources than from those committed to a candidate. That meant that when he became more of a threat and his opponents turned on him, he was suddenly taking on water with no one to help him bail.

Robertson received only 37 percent good press from nonpartisan sources. That was the worst score of any candidate other than Gary Hart. After New Hampshire, only 20 percent of nonpartisan sources had anything good to say about Robertson, only one percentage point more than reported positively on Hart during the Donna Rice episode.

So the natural fall-off in Robertson's good press produced by his opponents' attacks accelerated into a real tailspin when combined with the cutting comments of reporters and other outside analysts. The flavor of this final phase of Robertson's coverage was captured in a February 26 ABC report. Correspondent John Martin took him to task for a series of "remarkable statements" going back to his 1982 assertion that only Christians and Jews are qualified to serve in government.

After Martin criticized Robertson's "remarkably undisciplined tongue," political analyst Kevin Phillips pronounced Robertson "a little bit of a wacko."

Thus, the course of Robertson's coverage was influenced partly by events but also by news judgment. He made mistakes, but he had the bad luck for his mistakes to occur under the media magnifying glass. Equally important, he made the kind of mistakes that confirmed the political-journalistic community's suspicions about his weaknesses. When a politician's misstep justifies the negative expectations of political insiders, the cacophony of criticism feeds on itself. Biden's reputation survived his plagiarism, and Dukakis's high-mindedness kept his candidacy alive through its "attack video" crisis. But Robertson's "wacko" assertions joined Hart's hanky-panky and Dole's nasty temper as the kind of foible that dare not speak its mind.

## A Case of Bias?

When Senator Dole attacked the media's campaign coverage, he was not arguing solely on his own behalf. His alarm bell tolled for fellow Republicans as well. Dole complained that Republican candidates were subjected to a double standard of negative coverage by journalists who "see the world through liberal-colored glasses."

Was there a partisan bias in the networks' coverage? So far we have looked at the media profiles of individual candidates. To assess Dole's charge, we combined all 1,053 assessments of Democratic candidates and all 761 assessments of the Republicans. We then compared the two parties' overall good press/bad press ratios. The result was a slight edge for the Democrats--56 percent good press compared with 54 percent for the Republicans. After more than 1,800 evaluations of fourteen candidates over more than a year of campaigning, a partisan difference of only 2 percent looks more like balance than bias (see figure 4-12).

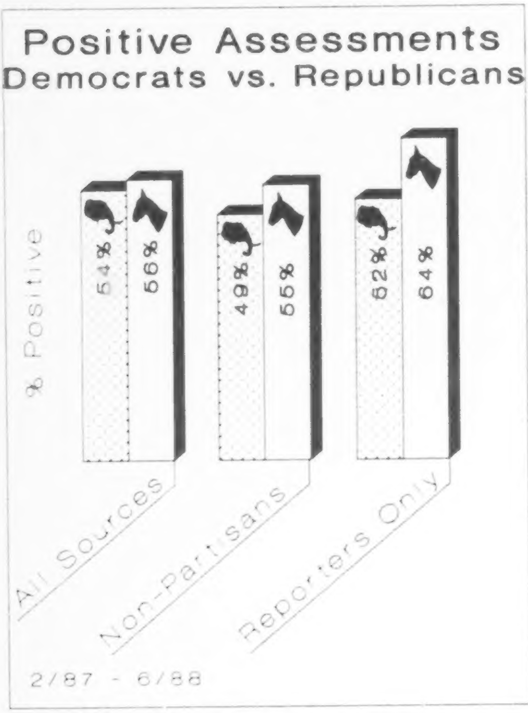


*Figure 4-12.*

If that was all--differences on the order of 2 percent between the two parties, across many hundreds of assessments--we could dismiss Senator Dole's charges of bias outright. But that was not quite all. The most thorough scholarly studies of recent elections have calculated good press not on the basis of all assessments, but only on the subset that we call nonpartisan assessments.[8] Not only are they the most influential sources of opinion, they also provide the clearest areas of leeway for journalistic interpretation. When the candidates attack each other, their comments demand coverage. Thus, in reporting Dole's press criticism, the *Washington Post* story comments that he did not take into account "whether the GOP race, which included some sharp, personal exchanges between Bush and Dole, was a more negative contest than the Democratic race."[9] But the analysts and other independent sources the networks broadcast (including reporters' own comments) are much more a matter of subjective judgment.

On this measure of good press, the gap between the parties widened somewhat. The Democrats held steady at 55 percent positive, while the Republicans dropped to 49 percent. And when we narrowed the focus to comments by journalists themselves, the gap widened further. The Democrats received 64 percent good press from journalists' own calculations, compared with 52 percent for Republicans.

We might also note that the most liberal of the major candidates in each party received better coverage than any of his competitors--Jackson among the Democrats, Dole among the Republicans. That finding carries a certain irony in light of Dole's charges, but should be considered on its own merits. Whether each man received such positive coverage because of his ideology is, of course, open to debate.

This was the only dimension on which we recorded a really substantial difference between assessments of the two parties. Even here, however, its significance is questionable. Journalists accounted for only about one in seven assessments that were broadcast. Most of their comments were directed toward the candidates' performances as campaigners, rather than their professional qualifications, personal qualities, or issue stands. This was in keeping with a general tendency by journalists to direct their own on-air opinions toward the horse race rather than the candidates' desirability.

Nonetheless, these distinctions raise the question of whether reporters might have directed their fire at Republican candidates' stands on policy issues as their most ideologically relevant target. Yet this category, which might be expected to produce the most partisan tilt by journalists, instead brought bad news for everybody. On the issue of "the issues," nearly two out of three judgments broadcast were negative. This was the leading cause of bad news for both parties. But the Republicans actually edged out the Democrats in issue-oriented good press by a margin of 39 to 34 percent.

Consider the major candidates' dismal levels of good press on the issues. Among Republicans, Dole's unimpressive 38 percent positive rating was well ahead of the 32 percent attained by Bush. But the worst issue press was recorded by Gephardt. He ran perhaps the most issue-oriented campaign of 1988, and the withering fire his trade policies drew was reflected in his minuscule 15 percent positive rating. His main Democratic rivals fared little better. Dukakis came in at only 24 percent positive and Simon at 38 percent. (Gore and Hart received almost no issue coverage.) Among the major candidates, only Jackson attained even moderately good press on his issue positions. His 43 percent positive coverage put him well ahead of the rest of the field. Jackson's issue coverage was light but positive during the early primaries (78 percent based on only nine assessments before Super Tuesday). Thereafter he attracted closer scrutiny, and his issue press plummeted to only 31 percent positive (eight of twenty-six assessments).

Issue assessments were a small part of the total good press/bad press package. There were barely 200, hardly more than one-tenth of all evaluations. The issue debate was more a sideshow than the center ring. The Democrats held the edge over the Republicans in positive assessments of their performance on the campaign trail, 54 percent to 46 percent. Jackson's campaign again led the pack, with 91 percent positive ratings. At the opposite end was Biden, with only 35 percent. They also led the GOP in assessments of past job performance, by 62 percent to 59 percent positive ratings. This time the leader was Dole, whose 84 percent good press reflected widespread praise of his role in the Senate. Low man was Bush at 42 percent. He got decidedly mixed reviews for his job as vice president. The Republicans finished in the lead in assessments of character, beating out the Democrats by 55 percent to 48 percent. This gap, however, mainly reflects the preponderance of criticism leveled at Gary Hart. When his 36 percent positive rating was removed, the assessments of the other Democrats rose to 62 percent positive on the character issue.

All in all, the evidence for Senator Dole's charge of bias was less than compelling. Democrats were favored over Republicans, but by margins that ranged from trivial to modest. Nor is it clear that the canons of fairness require reporting on two separate campaigns to yield similar mixtures of positive and negative judgments. It is one thing to balance judgments of candidates running against each other, but quite another to balance combined judgments of separate races. Jesse Jackson's Democratic opponents can make a far better statistical case for unbalanced reporting than Republicans per se can. For that matter, Bob Dole's Republican opponents might make a similar case. The real test of media fairness toward the two parties is not decided during the primaries. On the contrary, it is just beginning.

## Notes

1. See Benjamin Page, Robert Shapiro, and Glenn Dempsey, "What Moves Public Opinion?" *American Political Science Review* 81(1) March 1987, pp. 23-43, esp. pp. 31 ff.
2. On media treatment of Jackson's 1984 campaign in this regard, see C. Anthony Broh, *A Horse of a Different Color* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political Studies, 1987).
3. Michael J. Robinson and Margaret Sheehan, *Over the Wire and on TV* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983).
4. William C. Adams, "Media Coverage of Campaign '84. A Preliminary Report," *Public Opinion*, April/May 1984, pp. 9-13.
5. Maura Clancey and Michael J. Robinson, "General Election Coverage, Part I," *Public Opinion*, December/January 1985, pp. 49-54.
6. *Washington Post*, May 1, 1988.
7. *Washington Post*, February 22, 1988.
8. See, for example, Clancey and Robinson, "General Election Coverage"; Robinson and Sheehan, *Over the Wire*; and Gary Orren and Nelson Polsby, eds., *Media and Momentum* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1988).
9. *Washington Post*, April 27, 1988.

# 5

# The Final Tally

*What a long, strange trip it's been.*
--Jeff Greenfield, ABC, June 1988

When *Newsweek*'s Jon Alter blasted the campaign process in Iowa for its Alice in Wonderland qualities, he worried that "those politicians who survive these trials will be a breed of pedantic, mutant survivalists, not unlike the Fremen in *Dune*."[1] But the winners seem sublimely untouched by all the hype, hypocrisy, and hysteria that swirled about them. By the time their respective party conventions rolled around, the rejuvenated nominees seemed eager to hit the campaign trail again. It was only the journalists, analysts, and other assorted campaign watchers who were aged prematurely by their trips through Campaignland.

What conclusions can be drawn from the reporting and analysis of over 1,300 election stories? Do the findings justify sixteen months of viewing, coding, collating, and computing? Some of the results would surprise no one whose familiarity with television coverage goes beyond a screening of "Broadcast News." It is hardly newsworthy that the networks once again rode the horse race harder than the issues, or that New Hampshire was featured more often than New York, New Jersey, and New Mexico, or that Gary Hart got the worst press of any politician this side of Muammar Qaddafi. But many of the findings were not so obvious, and several contradicted the conventional wisdom of media critics, election watchers, and Washington insiders. Consider some widely noted assertions about television's role in campaign '88:

- Jackson's early efforts were hobbled by journalists who pinned a can't-win label on him. This may have been true in 1984, but in 1988 reporters voiced high expectations for Jackson, even before his Super Tuesday successes.
- Reporters hostile to Gephardt's trade policy turned the public against him. In fact, it was the other candidates who ganged up on Gephardt, and television faithfully recorded their attacks. Removing partisan sources from the equation, Gephardt received better press than Dukakis.
- Bush overcame a terrible press after Iowa to win a comeback victory in New Hampshire. On the contrary, this was the only time during the entire campaign when Bush received excellent press notices. Only his horse-race coverage suffered a turndown.
- Bush's January debate with Dan Rather helped the vice president's cause by countering his wimp image. Actually, Gallup data show that the incident lowered his standing among Iowa Republicans. And Bush may have paid a price, because CBS stepped up its criticism of his campaign.

In addition to disputing this year's instant analysis, our findings shed new light on some enduring concerns about television's role in the election process. No one denies that the medium has reshaped the course of contemporary elections. As Roger Mudd put it early in the primary campaign, "Television regards the election process as its own. TV sets the rules. . .to make the process conform to its way of covering the election."[2] But if television sets the election process in motion and charts its course, how decisively does it control the campaign's direction and destinations?

The three most persistent complaints about TV news are: (1) Television's saturation coverage of the horse race drives out any discussion of policy issues. (2) The networks favor liberals over conservatives, or Democrats over Republicans. (3) Television bestows precious momentum on some candidates and withholds it from others by its sometimes arbitrary coverage. How do these charges stack up against the evidence for campaign '88?

**Taking Issue with the Horse Race.** There is no doubt that television loves a horse race and dislikes issues. The medium thrives on excitement, conflict, and competition that packs an emotional punch. All these factors are built into elections but coexist uneasily with many policy debates. Virtually every study of election coverage has noted (if not decried) the primacy of horse-race news, and ours is no exception. Over 500 stories dealt with the horse race, two and one-half times the number that addressed policy issues. Moreover, that figure does not include over 300 discussions of campaign strategies and tactics, which also outdistanced the policy debate. Even when TV went looking for issues, it found ephemeral campaign disputes more often than enduring policy concerns. Hart's sex life and Bush's set-to with Dan Rather made for livelier viewing than either man's position papers.

Yet all the attention to the horse race and the daily campaign agenda failed to drive issue coverage off the airwaves. The issue coverage may look thin by comparison with the contest coverage, but 215 stories on policy issues can take in quite a lot. For example, the Iran-contra affair was brought up in over 100 election stories, reflecting questions about Bush's role. Over seventy-five stories mentioned each of the "big four" economic issues of 1988--taxes, trade, unemployment, and the state of the economy. Our Central American policy, the drug problem, education reform, civil rights, and the budget deficit also came up fairly often.

In fact, each of the ten most frequently cited issues was mentioned in over fifty stories, and twenty-five issues came up in at least twenty stories. (These figures do not include discussions of policy issues aired outside the context of election coverage.) The moral is that when running well over 1,000 stories that take up more than forty hours of airtime, the news can cover the horse race *and* the issues--at least all the issues the candidates want to talk about.

That's the rub, of course, and it raises a rarely noted problem with criticism of runaway horse-race news. Pundits and political scientists complain most about the absence of issue coverage. The candidates complain that the media do not carry their "message," a message usually calculated to fuzz over distinctions on policy issues and to avoid alienating potential supporters. Nor is it clear that average viewers thirst for more thorough and detailed debates on the INF treaty or the Middle East peace process. If they did, MacNeil and Lehrer would pass Rather, Brokaw, and Jennings in the Nielsen ratings.

The deeper problem with complaints about horse-race coverage is that the critics are asking the networks to do just what they criticize them for doing otherwise--to shape the campaign agenda by forcing the candidates to march to the media's tune. Television does not discuss policy issues in greater depth at least partly because the candidates do not, and the candidates do not because issue debates are frequently counterproductive. It didn't pay for Walter Mondale to be so forthright about raising taxes, and Dick Gephardt's trade proposals quickly became a lightning rod for criticism. Policy debates can even backfire on journalists, as Dan Rather learned when he tried to force a reluctant George Bush to discuss Iran-contra policy.

Horse-race news predominates because it flows from news values. It concerns what just happened and what is about to happen. It may be trivial, but it is timely trivia. That's also why campaign issues outstrip policy issues. The candidates' daily behavior on the campaign trail is less predictable, hence more potentially newsworthy than their stump speeches. In sum, the critics don't want to let journalists be journalists. But do they really want journalists to be more like political scientists?

**Paging Spiro Agnew. . .** The scholars may grumble about horse-race coverage, but it is partisan bias that brings cries of outrage from the politicians and their supporters. Conservatives have been the quickest to cry foul, and they got some empirical support from a controversial study by Edith Efron claiming network bias against Richard Nixon in 1972.[3] They also drew sustenance from the 1980 Rothman-Lichter survey of media elites, which found that four out of five major media journalists vote for the Democratic presidential candidate.[4] That same year, ironically, a large-scale study directed by Michael Robinson dampened the fires of conservative complaints.[5] The study found that liberal favorite Ted Kennedy had more negative print and broadcast coverage than Jimmy Carter in the primaries, and Carter got worse press than Ronald Reagan in the general election.

Just when journalists thought it was safe to reclaim the political center, however, Robinson's study of the 1984 election found dramatic differences in the networks' treatment of the two tickets. While Mondale and Ferraro each received slightly more positive than negative spin, Reagan's spin index was ten to one negative, and Bush had the dubious distinction of getting *only* negative spin.[6] And in a study of the 1984 primaries, Henry E. Brady and Richard Johnston found that Jesse Jackson received the most positive wire service coverage among the Democratic contenders.[7]

With this mixed bag of findings as prelude, we examined the good and bad press meted out to the various candidates in 1988. How do the claims of bias stack up against a systematic content analysis? Among Democrats, Jesse Jackson stands out for favorable press--he received the most positive coverage of any major candidate from both partisan and nonpartisan sources. Except in the early days when Bruce Babbitt was the media favorite, Jackson led the field during every phase of the campaign. Michael Dukakis's coverage hovered near the average for all candidates. Dukakis, Gore, and Simon all received only slightly more good than bad press. Gephardt fell just below the 50 percent mark, because of attacks from other candidates. His assessments from nonpartisan sources were better than those of Dukakis.

Among Republicans, Dole easily outdistanced both Bush and Robertson. Bush's ratings were mainly negative throughout the campaign, except for a brief spurt to 67 percent positive during the New Hampshire primary run, the only time that he was not the front-runner. Robertson, in contrast, received favorable early press--about two-to-one positive through New Hampshire. After that he was done in by controversies over his "funny facts" and received the worst press of any candidate still in the running--over two-to-one negative.

Did a partisan bias of the press affect the candidates' coverage? When we compared the two parties' overall ratios of good to bad press, the result was a slight edge for the Democrats--56 percent good press vs. 54 percent for the Republicans. After extensive coverage of fourteen candidates over more than a year of campaigning, even Spiro Agnew might not mind a partisan difference of only 2 percent.

When the comparisons focused on nonpartisan sources, however, the gap between the parties widened somewhat. The Democrats held steady at a 55 percent positive rating, while the Republicans dropped to 49 percent. A narrower focus on comments by journalists themselves reveals an even wider gap. The Democrats received 64 percent good press from journalists' on-air evaluations, compared with only 52 percent for Republicans. That is, reporters and anchors spoke favorably of the Democrats nearly two-thirds of the time that they ventured assessments, while they found favor with Republicans just over half the time.

Journalists, however, accounted for only about one in seven assessments that were broadcast. Most of their comments were directed toward the candidates' performances as campaigners rather than their professional qualifications, personal qualities, or stands on the issues. This was in keeping with a general tendency by journalists to direct their on-air opinions toward the horse race rather than the candidates' desirability.

All in all, the evidence for charges of partisan bias is less than compelling. Collectively, media coverage favored Democrats over Republicans, but by margins that ranged from trivial to modest. And much of the difference stemmed from the excellent press received by a single candidate--Jesse Jackson. Hart and Biden, both certified liberals, found that an ideological kinship with journalists offered no protection from the media gauntlet that lines the road to the White House. During the 1988 primary campaign, network coverage did not consistently favor the candidates of one party or one side of the political spectrum. A better case might be made that they simply favored Jackson over everyone else.

**Media and Momentum.** Finally, what about the media's vaunted role in bestowing precious momentum on winners or "hot" contenders in the early primaries? Not long ago pundits and politicians worshiped at the shrine of media momentum before going out to do battle in the primaries. Entire campaigns were staked on gaining enough media bounce from a good early showing to keep the ball rolling into the later big-delegate contests.

The model was Jimmy Carter, a political unknown who rode the media wave from Iowa to the Democratic nomination in 1976. A Carter staffer later admitted, "We had planned only for the short haul. After [that] it was all NBC, CBS, and the *New York Times*."[8] Losers have been even more blunt. After his 1980 pasting, dollar-rich but delegate-poor John Connally lamented, "On a scale of importance, the media is at least eight and everything else is two."[9] And media critic Barbara Matusow concluded in April, "1988 finds the media's power to confer legitimacy on a candidacy or to destroy it reaching new heights."[10]

Other analysts dispute this contention. ABC political analyst Jeff Greenfield, noting the conspicuous lack of momentum generated by Iowa victors Bob Dole and Dick Gephardt, concluded, "1988 has been shaped far less by media images than by political forces far older than television."[11] Political scientist and veteran campaign watcher Michael Robinson went even further, asserting, "1988 is confounding almost all the political wisdom we had built up from 1976, 1980, and 1984. . . . We thought momentum was everything, and it turned out to be ephemeral, if not meaningless."[12]

The argument is not likely to be resolved anytime soon, partly because television, like football quarterbacks, usually gets more of the credit and blame than it deserves. As William C. Adams concluded from his study of the 1984 Democratic race, "Media attention alone does not guarantee a constituency but only offers an opportunity to assemble one."[13] It was and is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for ultimate victory.

We can pin down the effects of media-borne momentum in the 1988 primaries by comparing candidate movement in the CBS News/*New York Times* preference polls with data from this study's content analysis. All the preprimary jockeying for posi-

**Presidential Preference Polls**

| | Dukakis | Jackson | Gore | Gephardt | Simon | Hart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jan. 1987 | 1% | 9% | --- | 2% | --- | 33% |
| May 1987 | 6% | 10% | 1% | 4% | 1% | 32% |
| May 1987* | 11% | 17% | 5% | 4% | 6% | --- |
| Jan 30 1988 | 6% | 17% | 4% | 4% | 9% | 23% |
| Feb 21 | 21% | 13% | 8% | 12% | 6% | 10% |
| Mar 22 | 29% | 22% | 14% | 8% | 6% | --- |
| May 12 | 68% | 20% | --- | --- | --- | --- |

| | Bush | Dole | Robertson |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jan 1987 | 36% | 15% | 5% |
| Jan 30 1988 | 41% | 22% | 7% |
| Feb 21 | 42% | 27% | 7% |
| Mar 22 | 63% | 20% | 7% |

Note: * = after Gary Hart's withdrawal.

Source: Survey of Democratic and Republican partisans by CBS News/New York Times, latest that of May 12, 1988.

*Table 5-1.*

### Share of Coverage

**Democrats**

| | Dukakis | Jackson | Gore | Gephardt | Simon | Hart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1987 | 11% | 13% | 9% | 12% | 12% | 22% |
| 1988 | | | | | | |
| Iowa | 15% | 7% | 6% | 21% | 19% | 17% |
| New Hamp. | 21% | 8% | 10% | 24% | 23% | 6% |
| Super Tues. | 20% | 19% | 20% | 23% | 11% | 4% |
| Midwest | 26% | 34% | 14% | 14% | 9% | 2% |
| New York | 31% | 33% | 33% | 0% | 2% | 0% |
| Post-N.Y. | 47% | 50% | 2% | 1% | 0% | 0% |

**Republicans**

| | Bush | Dole | Robertson |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1987 | 31% | 24% | 14% |
| 1988 | | | |
| Iowa | 23% | 31% | 14% |
| New Hamp. | 27% | 24% | 26% |
| Super Tues. | 24% | 24% | 35% |

Note: * = number of times quoted as a percentage of all candidates.

*Table 5-2.*

tion produced virtually no change in either party's standings (with the obvious exceptions of Gary Hart and Joe Biden) (see table 5-1). The TV coverage paralleled the poll results, as table 5-2 indicates. The networks set front-runner Hart apart from the rest of the crowded Democratic field. Among Republicans, the networks placed their bets on George Bush, Bob Dole, and Pat Robertson to win, place, and show, respectively.

Jesse Jackson was the only candidate who might reasonably claim that his level of early coverage did not match his popular support. But when he did manage to take the stage, he commanded the spotlight. The networks ran twice as many stories on Jackson as on Michael Dukakis, Richard Gephardt, Paul Simon, or Al Gore during 1987.

## CBS News Tracking Polls

| | Democrats | | Republicans | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Dukakis | Gephardt | Bush | Dole |
| Jan 30 1988 | 40% | 7% | 42% | 20% |
| Feb 9-10 | 38% | 19% | 35% | 27% |
| Feb 10-11 | 39% | 16% | 29% | 32% |
| Feb 12-13 | 42% | 18% | 30% | 31% |
| Feb 13-14 | 37% | 15% | 32% | 31% |
| Feb 14-15 | 38% | 13% | 34% | 30% |
| New Hampshire Vote - Feb 16 | 36% | 20% | 38% | 29% |

Note: Sample = New Hampshire likely primary voters.

*Table 5-3.*

It would be difficult to persuade Hart and Biden that the media no longer matter in election coverage. Dukakis, a near casualty of bad press over his campaign's role in skewering Biden, might also take some convincing. Hart's and Biden's early exits are reminders that the media not only produce momentum for winners but also winnow the field of losers. Winners are defined by media coverage (as in "better than expected" finishes) as well as by vote tabulations; losers include those who stumble in the media mine field, where verbal or behavioral missteps can blow up in their faces.

Once 1988 arrived, journalists turned from the polls to the early primaries to handicap the field. The big stories in Iowa were Gephardt's breakout from the pack, Dole's defeating front-runner Bush, and Robertson's surprisingly strong finish. All three were rewarded with proportionate jumps in media attention. From Iowa to Super Tuesday, Gephardt led all Democrats in amount of TV coverage, and Dole and Robertson attained parity with Bush.

What about the allegedly missing Iowa bounce? We found it hiding in the tracking polls. It propelled the victors upward in

New Hampshire, but not to the top. The results for both parties were remarkably similar (see table 5-3). On January 30, 1988, both Gephardt and Dole were trailing far behind the front-runners in New Hampshire. Immediately after their Iowa victories, each closed the gap by fourteen percentage points--not a bad little hop. Unfortunately for them, Gephardt was still nineteen points behind Dukakis and Dole eight points behind Bush in the tracking polls conducted on February 9 and 10.

Despite some daily fluctuations, that's about the way it ended. Dukakis finished sixteen percentage points ahead of Gephardt in New Hampshire, and Bush beat Dole by nine points. In each case, a well-known incumbent (Dukakis locally, Bush nationally) held on to a core of supporters ranging from 35 percent to 40 percent of the primary electorate. Iowa victories helped their challengers close the gap substantially, but not entirely.

The narrowness of Dole's defeat in New Hampshire reflected a continuing surge that carried him to a three-point lead in the polls on February 11, a remarkable twenty-five-point turnaround since Iowa. But the lead proved short-lived, as the polls tracked a gradual but steady shift back to Bush. The bounce was there--it just wasn't high enough to surmount the superior organization and the twenty-two-point lead held by Reagan's self-designated heir.

Many pundits--and Dole himself--attributed the New Hampshire defeat to a late (and unanswered) negative TV ad that Bush had run. The ad may have had an effect, but so might the free media attention Bush received. The week between the Iowa and New Hampshire votes was the only time during the entire campaign that Bush received mainly good press on network TV. Suddenly there were stories about his loyalty, steadiness, and experience, rather than his wimpiness, evasiveness, and possible involvement in the Iran-contra affair. (In fact Iran-contra virtually disappeared as an issue on the news before New Hampshire, after topping the charts before Iowa.)

For one brief but critical moment, George Bush became a media favorite. The one time that Bush was the underdog, his on-air evaluations leaped from 41 percent to 67 percent positive. While everyone was focusing on Bush's Iowa defeat, his decline in the polls, his campaign's "desperation," his "last-ditch effort," and so forth, he was also being portrayed as a good guy for a change. This news pattern is a classic one: attack the front-runners but let up on the underdogs. The portrait of a good man in desperate straits may have been just the right image to shore up Bush's supporters and get them out to the polls.

By contrast, Gephardt--for all his new-found attention--fell victim to the media malaise that enveloped the Democratic field. Every candidate except Jesse Jackson received more bad press than good press during the critical (and heavily covered) New Hampshire and Super Tuesday campaigning. Contributing to the bad press was the bumper crop of debates and attack ads, whose zingers provided perfect ten-second sound bites for the evening news shows. As a result each campaign organization strove to outdo the others in crafting pithy put-downs and devastating one-liners that would reverberate across the airwaves. Nobody came up with another "Where's the beef?" but their efforts produced plenty of footage indicting Gephardt's flip-flops, Simon's rose-colored economics, Gore's sudden hawkishness, and Dukakis's prosaic persona.

The negative coverage may also reflect preemptive media strikes by journalists. Ever since Jimmy Carter took them by surprise, journalists have tried to counter campaign media strategies by stepping up their scrutiny of anyone who seems likely to break out of the pack. If they cannot keep the primaries from becoming media lotteries, they may prevent the winners from cashing in their chips. Table 5-4 shows how quickly media criticism caught up with both Simon and Gephardt after they moved forward in Iowa. Gephardt never got out from under the dark cloud of bad press. Simon's bad press quickly faded into no press. Dukakis began taking his lumps as soon as the campaign shifted to New Hampshire, where he was cursed with the front-runner status that virtually guarantees increased news scrutiny. Even Gore saw his modest level of good press drop after his Super Tuesday victories.

## Positive Candidate Evaluations

### Democrats

| | Dukakis | Jackson | Gore | Gephardt | Simon | Hart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1987 | 64% | 84% | --- | 78% | 92% | 38% |
| 1988 | | | | | | |
| Iowa | 53% | 86% | --- | 48% | 31% | 34% |
| New Hamp. | 45% | --- | --- | 40% | 39% | --- |
| Super Tues. | 42% | 73% | 50% | 41% | --- | --- |
| Midwest | 63% | 79% | 42% | 38% | --- | --- |
| New York | 53% | 60% | 55% | --- | --- | --- |
| Post N.Y. | 61% | 69% | --- | --- | --- | --- |

### Republicans

| | Bush | Dole | Roberston |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1987 | 48% | 80% | 59% |
| 1988 | | | |
| Iowa | 41% | 54% | 82% |
| New Hamp. | 67% | 66% | 65% |
| Post N.Y. | 44% | 56% | 33% |

Note: * = Proportion of positive statements from all sources on TV news. This excludes horse-race assessments. Dash = fewer than five evaluations.

*Table 5-4.*

**The Jackson Factor** Who was the latest candidate to benefit from a media boost? It was Jesse Jackson, who had 78 percent positive press between January and April 5, 1988. Jackson's share of the coverage more than doubled after New Hampshire and continued to grow after Super Tuesday. In the month after Super Tuesday, he was the subject of over three times as many TV news stories as any other Democrat. During that time he jumped nine points in the polls to claim "co-front-runner" status with Dukakis. Equally important, virtually all his gains were among whites. And the ABC News/*Washington Post* poll found that the proportion of the public who regard Jackson unfavorably dropped even further, from 45 to 30 percent.

Thus Jackson became the latest beneficiary of media-generated momentum. His good fortune was not unearned. It resulted from skillful campaigning and a growing ability to attract white votes, along with a big Super Tuesday showing. But it also reflects the subjective process of news judgment. Jackson's airtime increased and his horse-race coverage improved after journalists decided that his increased appeal since 1984 among both blacks and whites could make him the winner of several Southern primaries. This prospect, more than Jackson's actual accomplishments, qualified him as a serious candidate in the minds of the media. Jackson's share of the white vote in Iowa and New Hampshire, along with projections of Super Tuesday success, created a great story, and the media ran with it.

Jackson's media gain was Gore's loss. Although Gore won as many primaries as Jackson on March 8 and nearly as many votes, Super Tuesday gave a turbo boost to Jackson's media charge. His share of the Democratic candidates' TV coverage leaped from only 8 percent before New Hampshire to 19 percent during the Super Tuesday campaign to 34 percent during the Illinois and Wisconsin primaries and the Michigan caucus. By contrast, Gore's share of the coverage actually declined after Super Tuesday, from 19 percent to 14 percent.

Rather than negating the lessons of past elections, Jackson's sudden surge at Gore's expense recalls Gary Hart's media bonanza in 1984.[14] Reporters picked long-shot Gary Hart over George McGovern as the hot prospect that year after both did better than expected in Iowa. McGovern actually came within 2,000 votes of Hart but received even less coverage after Iowa than before, while Hart's share increased fivefold on CBS News and tenfold on NBC News.

In fact Jackson's coverage after New Hampshire looked a lot like Hart's after Iowa four years earlier. Each rocketed upward in the polls by doing better than expected and following up with impressive victories. Each received that sought-after combination of great press and a great deal of it. Hart's trajectory turned downward after a barrage of critical network reports just before Super Tuesday apparently pushed late deciders into Mondale's camp. Jackson's media wave continued to build until it crashed against the shoals of the New York primary.

**Little Mo'.** Media momentum, though still with us, is not now and has never been inexorable. It doesn't guarantee a touchdown, only a chance to keep the ball for another play. And if the player should fumble the ball, he may never recover. Bursts of media attention brought shifts in the polls throughout the campaign--Hart's fall in 1987; the February 1988 surges of Dukakis, Gephardt, and Dole; and the Jackson boomlet in March. But their modest gains pale before the thirty-one-point gain by Gary Hart in ten days after his better-than-expected 1984 Iowa finish.

What caused the big mo' of 1987 to downshift into 1988's little mo'? Two explanations stand out. First, nonmedia factors placed a cap on the benefits available to would-be media candidates. Dole and Gephardt both had to battle opponents who had the advantage of vicarious incumbency in New Hampshire. Bush's close tie to the incumbent president became a plus there, and Massachusetts Governor Dukakis already had a positive image among his home state's next-door neighbors. As for Jackson, analysts and partisans have heatedly debated whether his appeal is limited by his race or his ideology. That such limits exist is not debated.

Second, what television gave with one hand, it took back with the other. Gephardt received the most negative coverage of the major Democratic contenders after Iowa. Dole's ill-chosen remarks attacking Bush the night of the New Hampshire vote became a major "mediality" (an event whose impact is vastly inflated by media attention) by resurrecting the "mean Bob Dole" story. By avoiding such blunders, Jackson gained the same lasting benefit that Hart did in 1984--a new prominence whose payoff is not limited to the current campaign. One of momentum's benefits is deferred compensation.

As in earlier elections, the media were dealing the cards in 1988. But in politics, it's not just the hand you're dealt, it's how you play it that counts. Whatever else has changed in the age of media-saturated elections, you've still got to know when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em.

## Notes

1. Jon Alter, *Newsweek*, February 1, 1988, p. 21.
2. Quoted in Dayton, Ohio, *Daily News*, April 24, 1988, p. 8A.
3. Edith Efron, *The News Twisters* (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing Company, 1971).
4. S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman, "Media and Business Elites," *Public Opinion*, October/November 1981, pp. 42-46, 59-60; S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman, and Linda Lichter, *The Media Elite* (Washington, D.C.: Adler & Adler, 1986).
5. Michael J. Robinson and Margaret Sheehan, *Over the Wire and on TV* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983).
6. Maura Clancey and Michael J. Robinson, "General Election Coverage: Part I," *Public Opinion*, December/January 1985, pp. 49-54. Political scientist Doris Graber found similar results after taking into account visual as well as verbal material. See Doris Graber, "Kind Words and Harsh Pictures," in Kay Schlozman, ed., *Elections in America* (Winchester, Mass.: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp. 115 41.
7. Henry Brady and Richard Johnston, "What's the Primary Message: Horse Race or Issue Journalism?" in Gary Orren and Nelson Polsby, *Media and Momentum* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1988), pp. 127-86.
8. Quoted in F. Christopher Arterton, "Campaign Organizations Confront the Media-Political Environment," in James David Barber, ed., *Race for the Presidency* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p. 7.
9. "John Connally Critiques the Press," *Washington Journalism Review*, July/August 1980, p. 20.
10. Barbara Matusow, "Fear and Loathing '88," *Washingtonian*, April 1988, p. 115.

11. Jeff Greenfield, "They Were Wrong about Television," *New York Times*, April 5, 1988.
12. Quoted in *Washington Post*, March 10, 1988, p. A29.
13. William C. Adams, "Media Coverage of Campaign '84," *Public Opinion*, April/May 1984.
14. Ibid.

## Appendix A

# Key to Primary Periods

| Heading | Dates |
|---|---|
| 1987 | 2/8/87 - 12/31/87 |
| Iowa | 1/1/88 - 2/8/88 |
| New Hamp. | 2/9/88 - 2/16/88 |
| Super Tues. | 2/17/88 - 3/8/88 |
| Midwest | 3/9/88 - 4/5/88 |
| New York | 4/6/88 - 4/18/88 |
| Post-N.Y. | 4/19/88 - 6/7/88 |

## Appendix B

## 1988 Democratic Primary Results

| | Date | Turnout | Dukakis | Jackson | Gore | Gephardt | Simon | Hart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New Hamp. | (2/16/88) | 123,360 | 35.8% | 7.8% | 6.8% | 19.8% | 17.1% | 4.0% |
| South Dakota | (2/23/88) | 71,606 | 31.2% | 5.4% | 8.4% | 43.5% | 5.6% | 5.4% |
| Vermont | (3/1/88) | 50,791 | 55.8% | 25.7% | ---- | 7.7% | 5.2% | 4.0% |
| Alabama | (3/8/88) | 405,642 | 7.7% | 43.6% | 37.4% | 7.4% | 0.8% | 1.9% |
| Arkansas | (3/8/88) | 497,544 | 18.9% | 17.1% | 37.3% | 12.0% | 1.8% | 3.7% |
| Florida | (3/8/88) | 1,273,298 | 40.9% | 20.0% | 12.7% | 14.4% | 2.2% | 2.9% |
| Georgia | (3/8/88) | 622,752 | 15.6% | 39.8% | 32.4% | 6.7% | 1.3% | 2.5% |
| Kentucky | (3/8/88) | 318,721 | 18.6% | 15.6% | 45.8% | 9.1% | 2.9% | 3.7% |
| Louisiana | (3/8/88) | 624,450 | 15.3% | 35.5% | 28.0% | 10.6% | 0.8% | 4.2% |
| Maryland | (3/8/88) | 531,335 | 45.6% | 28.7% | 8.7% | 7.9% | 3.1% | 1.8% |
| Massachusetts | (3/8/88) | 713,447 | 58.6% | 18.7% | 4.4% | 10.2% | 3.7% | 1.5% |
| Mississippi | (3/8/88) | 361,811 | 8.3% | 44.4% | 33.3% | 5.4% | 0.6% | 3.7% |
| Missouri | (3/8/88) | 527,805 | 11.6% | 20.2% | 2.8% | 57.8% | 4.1% | 1.4% |
| North Carolina | (3/8/88) | 679,958 | 20.3% | 33.0% | 34.7% | 5.5% | 1.2% | 2.4% |
| Oklahoma | (3/8/88) | 392,727 | 16.9% | 13.3% | 41.4% | 21.0% | 1.8% | 3.7% |
| Rhode Island | (3/8/88) | 49,029 | 69.8% | 15.2% | 4.0% | 4.1% | 2.8% | 1.5% |
| Tennessee | (3/8/88) | 576,314 | 3.4% | 20.7% | 72.3% | 1.5% | 0.5% | 0.8% |
| Texas | (3/8/88) | 1,766,904 | 32.8% | 24.5% | 20.2% | 13.6% | 2.0% | 4.7% |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Virginia | (3/8/88) | 364,899 | 22.0% | 45.1% | 22.3% | 4.4% | 1.9% | 1.7% |
| Illinois | (3/15/88) | 1,500,928 | 16.3% | 32.3% | 5.1% | 2.3% | 42.3% | 0.9% |
| Puerto Rico | (3/20/88) | 356,178 | 22.9% | 29.0% | 14.4% | 3.0% | 18.2% | 7.5% |
| Connecticut | (3/29/88) | 241,395 | 58.1% | 28.3% | 7.7% | 0.4% | 1.3% | 2.4% |
| Wisconsin | (4/5/88) | 1,014,782 | 47.6% | 28.2% | 17.4% | 0.8% | 4.8% | 0.7% |
| New York | (4/19/88) | 1,575,186 | 50.9% | 37.1% | 10.0% | 0.2% | 1.1% | ---- |
| Pennsylvania | (4/26/88) | 1,507,690 | 66.5% | 27.3% | 3.0% | 0.5% | 0.6% | 1.4% |
| D. C. | (5/3/88) | 86,052 | 17.9% | 80.0% | 0.8% | 0.3% | 0.9% | ---- |
| Indiana | (5/3/88) | 645,708 | 69.6% | 22.5% | 3.4% | 2.6% | 1.9% | ---- |
| Ohio | (5/3/88) | 1,376,135 | 62.7% | 27.5% | 2.2% | ---- | 1.1% | 2.1% |
| Nebraska | (5/10/88) | 169,008 | 62.9% | 25.7% | 1.5% | 2.9% | 1.2% | 2.5% |
| West Virginia | (5/10/88) | 322,148 | 78.9% | 14.0% | 3.6% | ---- | 0.7% | ---- |
| Oregon | (5/17/88) | 388,932 | 56.8% | 38.1% | 1.4% | 1.7% | 1.2% | ---- |
| Idaho | (5/24/88) | 51,370 | 73.4% | 15.7% | 3.7% | ---- | 2.7% | ---- |
| California | (6/7/88) | 3,089,164 | 60.8% | 35.2% | 1.8% | ---- | 1.4% | ---- |
| Montana | (6/7/88) | 120,962 | 68.7% | 22.1% | 1.8% | 2.8% | 1.3% | ---- |
| New Jersey | (6/7/88) | 640,479 | 63.2% | 32.9% | 2.8% | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| New Mexico | (6/7/88) | 188,610 | 61.0% | 28.1% | 2.5% | ---- | 1.5% | 3.7% |
| North Dakota | (6/14/88) | 3,405 | 84.9% | 15.1% | ---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |

Note: Dashes indicate that the candidate did not participate.

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## Appendix C

## Democratic Caucus Results

| (Date) | Turnout | Dukakis | Jackson | Gore | Simon | Gephardt | Others | Unc.* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Iowa (2/8/88) | 126,000 | 22.1% | 8.8% | 0.0% | 26.7% | 31.3% | 6.5% | 4.6% |
| Minnesota (2/23/88) | 100,000 | 33.3% | 19.8% | 1.0% | 17.9% | 7.1% | 2.3% | 18.6% |
| Maine (2/28/88) | 11,000 | 42.2% | 26.8% | 1.5% | 4.2% | 3.1% | 1.6% | 20.6% |
| Wyoming (3/5/88) | 2,968 | 26.1% | 12.9% | 26.9% | 3.4% | 23.1% | 0.3% | 7.3% |
| Hawaii (3/8/88) | 3,914 | 52.7% | 37.8% | 1.0% | 0.9% | 2.2% | 0.8% | 4.6% |
| Idaho (3/8/88) | 4,633 | 37.8% | 19.4% | 8.4% | 4.2% | 0.8% | 0.0% | 29.4% |
| Nevada (3/8/88) | 5,048 | 26.0% | 20.9% | 34.6% | 1.0% | 1.8% | 0.3% | 15.4% |
| Texas (3/8/88) | 100,000 | 31.4% | 36.4% | 17.0% | 0.5% | 2.5% | 0.2% | 11.9% |
| Washington (3/8/88) | 104,000 | 44.0% | 34.6% | 2.4% | 3.7% | 1.0% | 0.4% | 13.9% |
| Am. Samoa (3/8/88) | 36 | 38.9% | 5.6% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 22.2% | 0.0% | 33.3% |
| Alaska (3/10/88) | 2,600 | 29.6% | 34.6% | 1.9% | 0.7% | 1.1% | 0.3% | 31.8% |
| South Carolina (3/12/88) | 45,000 | 6.3% | 54.8% | 16.8% | 0.4% | 1.8% | 0.0% | 19.9% |
| Kansas (3/19/88) | 8,837 | 36.5% | 30.8% | 16.2% | 0.0% | 1.6% | 0.0% | 14.9% |
| Dems Abroad (3/22/88) | 2,385 | 41.5% | 14.5% | 5.0% | 10.4% | 1.8% | 26.8% | --- |
| Michigan (3/26/88) | 212,668 | 29.0% | 53.5% | 2.0% | 2.1% | 12.8% | 0.4% | 0.2% |
| North Dakota (3/13-27) | 2,530 | 27.4% | 18.9% | 5.4% | 5.9% | 17.5% | 4.2% | 20.7% |
| Virgin Is. (4/2/88) | 721 | 10.3% | 85.2% | ---- | ---- | ---- | ---- | 4.5% |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Colorado (4/4/88) | 35,022 | 42.4% | 33.6% | 2.7% | 0.3% | 0.0% | 0.1% | 20.9% |
| Arizona (4/16/88) | 38,463 | 54.1% | 37.8% | 5.1% | 1.2% | ---- | 0.1% | 1.7% |
| Delaware (4/18/88) | 4,660 | 27.2% | 45.8% | 2.1% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 24.9% |
| Vermont (4/19/88) | 6,000 | 44.7% | 45.7% | 0.5% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 9.1% |
| Utah (4/25/88) | 11,097 | 71.6% | 15.4% | ---- | ---- | ---- | 1.6% | 11.4% |

*Unc. = uncommitted.

Note: Dashes indicate that the candidate did not participate.

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## Appendix D

### Democratic Horse Race Judgments*

Percent Positive (n**)

| Candidate | 1987 | Iowa | New Hamp. | Super Tuesday | Midwest | New York | Post-New York |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jackson | 87% (47) | 41% (22) | 62% (21) | 87% (70) | 86% (164) | 52% (42) | 32% (60) |
| Dukakis | 83% (41) | 91% (47) | 99% (72) | 95% (80) | 77% (158) | 90% (59) | 96% (156) |
| Gore | 65% (26) | 45% (11) | 43% (7) | 64% (25) | 37% (43) | 30% (40) | 8% (25) |
| Gephardt | 64% (36) | 92% (71) | 70% (40) | 49% (39) | 13% (61) | ---- --- | ---- --- |
| Simon | 74% (38) | 85% (41) | 53% (30) | 13% (24) | 60% (42) | ---- --- | ---- --- |
| Babbitt | 33% (12) | 25% (24) | 8% (13) | 0% (10) | ---- --- | ---- --- | ---- --- |
| Hart | 41% (150) | 38% (63) | 17% (12) | 20% (10) | 0% (13) | ---- --- | ---- --- |
| Biden | 30% (23) | ---- --- | ---- --- | ---- --- | ---- --- | ---- --- | ---- --- |

*Based on clearly positive and negative source horse race judgments, excluding candidate assessments.

** n equals number of judgments.

Note: Dashes indicate that no clearly positive or negative judgments were made.

Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs content analysis of the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news from February 1987 through June 1988.

## Appendix E

### Assessments of Democratic Candidates*

Percent Positive (n**)

|  | 1987 | Iowa | New Hamp. | Super Tues. | Midwest | New York | Post-N.Y. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jackson | 84% (31) | 86% (7) | 100% (3) | 73% (41) | 79% (85) | 60% (47) | 69% (35) |
| Dukakis | 64% (22) | 53% (15) | 45% (20) | 42% (52) | 63% (40) | 53% (36) | 61% (64) |
| Gore | 75% (4) | 33% (3) | 100% (3) | 50% (14) | 42% (12) | 55% (20) | 100% (1) |
| Gephardt | 78% (23) | 48% (48) | 40% (25) | 41% (49) | 38% (16) | --- --- | --- --- |
| Simon | 92% (13) | 31% (16) | 39% (23) | 0% (1) | 100% (4) | --- --- | --- --- |
| Babbitt | 84% (19) | 91% (11) | 100% (1) | 100% (2) | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- |
| Hart | 38% (151) | 34% (32) | 0% (1) | 0% (1) | 0% (1) | --- --- | --- --- |
| Biden | 54% (61) | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- |

*Based on clearly positive and negative source assessments, excluding horse race judgments.

** n equals number of assessments.

Note: Dashes indicate that no clearly positive or negative assessments were made.

Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs content analysis of the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news from February 1987 through June 1988.

## Appendix F

## 1988 Republican Primary Results

| | Date | Turnout | Bush | Dole | Robertson | Kemp |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New Hampshire | (2/16/88) | 157,625 | 37.6% | 28.4% | 9.4% | 12.8% |
| South Dakota | (2/23/88) | 93,405 | 18.6% | 55.2% | 19.6% | 4.6% |
| Vermont | (3/1/88) | 47,832 | 49.3% | 39.0% | 5.1% | 3.9% |
| South Carolina | (3/5/88) | 195,292 | 48.5% | 20.6% | 19.1% | 11.5% |
| Alabama | (3/8/88) | 213,515 | 64.5% | 16.3% | 13.9% | 4.9% |
| Arkansas | (3/8/88) | 68,305 | 47.0% | 25.9% | 18.9% | 5.1% |
| Florida | (3/8/88) | 901,222 | 62.1% | 21.2% | 10.6% | 4.6% |
| Georgia | (3/8/88) | 400,928 | 53.8% | 23.6% | 16.3% | 5.8% |
| Kentucky | (3/8/88) | 121,402 | 59.3% | 23.0% | 11.1% | 3.3% |
| Louisiana | (3/8/88) | 144,781 | 57.8% | 17.7% | 18.2% | 5.3% |
| Maryland | (3/8/88) | 200,754 | 53.3% | 32.4% | 6.4% | 5.9% |
| Massachusetts | (3/8/88) | 241,181 | 58.5% | 26.3% | 4.5% | 7.0% |
| Mississippi | (3/8/88) | 158,872 | 66.0% | 16.9% | 13.5% | 3.4% |
| Missouri | (3/8/88) | 400,300 | 42.2% | 41.1% | 11.2% | 3.5% |
| North Carolina | (3/8/88) | 273,801 | 45.4% | 39.1% | 9.8% | 4.1% |
| Oklahoma | (3/8/88) | 208,938 | 37.4% | 34.9% | 21.1% | 5.5% |
| Rhode Island | (3/8/88) | 16,035 | 64.9% | 22.6% | 5.7% | 4.9% |
| Tennessee | (3/8/88) | 254,252 | 60.0% | 21.6% | 12.6% | 4.3% |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Texas | (3/8/88) | 1,014,956 | 63.9% | 13.9% | 15.3% | 5.0% |
| Virginia | (3/8/88) | 234,142 | 53.3% | 26.0% | 13.7% | 4.6% |
| Illinois | (3/15/88) | 858,256 | 54.7% | 36.0% | 6.8% | 1.5% |
| Puerto Rico | (3/20/88) | 3,973 | 97.1% | 2.7% | 0.1% | --- |
| Connecticut | (3/29/88) | 104,171 | 70.6% | 20.2% | 3.1% | 3.1% |
| Wisconsin | (4/5/88) | 359,294 | 82.2% | 7.9% | 6.9% | 1.4% |
| Pennsylvania | (4/26/88) | 870,549 | 79.0% | 11.9% | 9.1% | --- |
| D. C. | (5/3/88) | 6,720 | 87.6% | 7.0% | 4.0% | --- |
| Indiana | (5/3/88) | 437,655 | 80.4% | 9.8% | 6.6% | 3.3% |
| Ohio | (5/3/88) | 794,904 | 81.0% | 11.9% | 7.1% | --- |
| Nebraska | (5/10/88) | 204,490 | 68.0% | 22.3% | 5.1% | 4.1% |
| West Virginia | (5/10/88) | 122,346 | 89.3% | ---- | 8.6% | --- |
| Oregon | (5/17/88) | 274,451 | 72.9% | 17.9% | 7.7% | --- |
| Idaho | (5/24/88) | 68,275 | 81.2% | ---- | 8.6% | --- |
| California | (6/7/88) | 2,193,579 | 82.8% | 12.9% | 4.2% | --- |
| Montana | (6/7/88) | 85,907 | 73.2% | 19.5% | ---- | --- |
| New Jersey | (6/7/88) | 242,272 | 100% | ---- | ---- | --- |
| New Mexico | (6/7/88) | 88,744 | 78.2% | 10.5% | 6.0% | --- |
| North Dakota | (6/14/88) | 39,434 | 94.0% | ---- | ---- | --- |

Note: Dashes indicate that the candidate did not participate.

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Appendix G

## Republican Caucus Results

| | Date | Turnout | Bush | Dole | Robertson | Kemp | Others | Unc.* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Michigan | (1/14/88) | ---- | 57.2% | 2.6% | 22.4% | 17.1% | 0.7% | 0.0% |
| Hawaii | (2/4/88) | 4,000-5,000 | 8.7% | 9.1% | 81.3% | 0.6% | 0.3% | 0.0% |
| Kansas | (2/1-7/88) | 25,431 | 0.0% | 98.7% | 0.5% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.8% |
| Iowa | (2/8/88) | 108,838 | 18.6% | 37.3% | 24.6% | 11.1% | 7.7% | 0.7% |
| Nevada | (2/18/88) | 5,038 | 26.6% | 22.4% | 14.6% | 12.8% | 0.9% | 22.7% |
| Minnesota | (2/23/88) | 56,563 | 10.6% | 42.3% | 28.2% | 15.1% | 1.0% | 2.8% |
| Wyoming | (2/9-24/88) | 794 | 36.6% | 36.6% | 9.2% | 7.1% | 0.0% | 10.5% |
| Alaska | (2/27-3/1/88) | 4,000 | 24.2% | 19.7% | 46.8% | 6.9% | 2.4% | 0.0% |
| Washington | (3/8/88) | 15,210 | 24.3% | 26.0% | 39.0% | 7.5% | 0.3% | 2.9% |
| Colorado | (4/4/88) | 15,238 | 76.3% | ---- | 9.5% | ---- | ---- | 14.2% |

*Unc. = uncommitted

Note: Dashes indicate that the candidate did not participate.

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## Appendix H

### Republican Horse Race Judgments*

Percent Positive (n**)

| Candidate | 1987 | Iowa | New Hamp. | Super Tuesday | Midwest | New York | Post-New York |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bush | 73% (113) | 72% (97) | 49% (121) | 92% (123) | 90% (104) | 100% (6) | 48% (75) |
| Dole | 82% (56) | 92% (74) | 88% (75) | 52% (62) | 14% (104) | ---- --- | ---- --- |
| Du Pont | 10% (10) | 11% (9) | 0% (9) | 11% (9) | ---- --- | ---- --- | ---- --- |
| Haig | 6% (18) | 13% (8) | 0% (16) | ---- --- | ---- --- | ---- --- | ---- --- |
| Kemp | 35% (20) | 61% (31) | 32% (22) | 17% (30) | 0% (10) | ---- --- | ---- --- |
| Robertson | 84% (50) | 83% (54) | 60% (60) | 39% (56) | 15% (13) | 0% (2) | 0% (4) |

*Based on clearly positive and negative source horse race judgments, excluding candidate assessments.

** n equals number of judgments.

Note: Dashes indicate that no clearly positive or negative judgments were made.

Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs content analysis of the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news from February 1987 through June 1988.

## Appendix 1

### Assessments of Republican Candidates*

Percent Positive (n**)

| Candidate | 1987 | Iowa | New Hamp. | Super Tues. | Midwest | York | Post-N. Y. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bush | 48% (89) | 41% (98) | 67% (64) | 44% (55) | 67% (15) | 14% (7) | 61% (51) |
| Dole | 80% (35) | 54% (61) | 66% (38) | 56% (27) | 75% (20) | --- --- | --- --- |
| Robertson | 59% (29) | 82% (11) | 65% (26) | 33% (52) | 0% (4) | --- --- | --- --- |
| Kemp | 79% (19) | 46% (24) | 50% (2) | 40% (5) | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- |
| Du Pont | 40% (10) | 75% (4) | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- |
| Haig | 85% (7) | 60% (5) | 33% (3) | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- | --- --- |

*Based on clearly positive and negative source assessments, excluding horse race judgments.

** n equals number of assessments.

Note: Dashes indicate that no clearly positive or negative assessments were made.

Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs content analysis of ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news from February 1987 through June 1988.

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# THE VIDEO CAMPAIGN

## Network Coverage of the 1988 Primaries

S. Robert Lichter, Daniel Amundson, and Richard Noyes

---

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*Los Angeles Times*

In an analysis of every election story on TV network news from February 1987 through the California primary in June 1988, the authors cast new light on the role of the media in presidential election campaigns.

They look at the continuing controversies over the heavy media concentration on the early Iowa and New Hampshire primaries, the coverage of the issues versus the "horse race" between the candidates, the charges of liberal bias, and the media's ability to bestow momentum on favored candidates. They also provide a systematic look at the unique features of campaign '88, including the impact of the many debates on the campaign's coverage and charges that Jesse Jackson got either a free ride or a rough ride from journalists.

The book examines in detail how journalists, politicians, and election analysts portrayed the campaign and the candidates to the national television audience. Separate chapters deal with the issues of the campaign, the way the horse race was depicted, and the good press and bad press received by each candidate. The media coverage is compared with poll results to determine how each candidate gained or lost ground as a result of his media image.

*The Video Campaign* is based on the first scientific study to monitor election news while the campaign was still in progress. Its findings have been cited in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *U.S. News & World Report*.

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